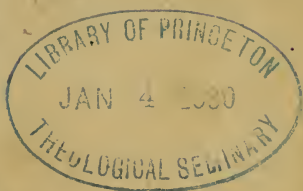




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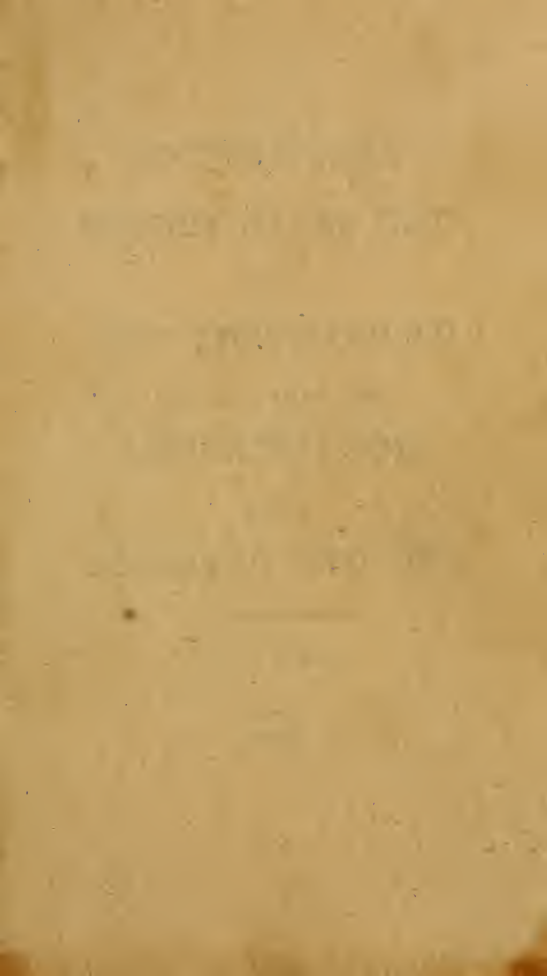
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SOCINIANISM
BROUGHT TO THE TEST:
OR
JESUS CHRIST PROVED
TO BE EITHER THE
ADORABLE GOD,
OR A
NOTORIOUS IMPOSTOR.



Third Edition.

1805.



SOCINIANISM
BROUGHT TO THE TEST:

OR
JESUS CHRIST PROVED

TO BE EITHER THE
ADORABLE GOD,

OR A
NOTORIOUS IMPOSTOR,

IN
TWENTY LETTERS

TO THE
REVEREND DOCTOR PRIESTLEY,

IN WHICH IT APPEARS,

*That if JESUS CHRIST is not a Divine Person
the Mohammedan is, in all respects, preferable
to the Christian Religion, and the Ko-
ran a better Book than the Bible.*

If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow
him. I KINGS xviii. 21.

By JOHN MACGOWAN,

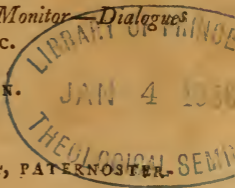
*Author of Arian and Socinian's Monitor—Dialogues
of Devils—Death a Vision, &c.*

THIRD EDITION.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR W. BAYNES, 54, PATERNOSTER-
ROW.

1805.



Gracie, Printer, Berwick.

LETTER I.

Reverend Sir,

CALLING the other day at your Bookfeller's shop, I saw a pamphlet lying on the counter, entitled, *A Free Address to Protestant Dissenters on the Subject of Church Discipline, with a Preliminary Discourse concerning the Spirit of Christianity and the Corruption of it by False Notions of Religion*, BY JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, L L. D. F. R. S. and which the bookfeller recommended to me *as a very sensible pamphlet*. Forgetting that it is the business of a dealer to speak well of the commodity he sells, I took the book upon his recommendation, somewhat encouraged by the ensigns of honour which the author trailed after him, as L L. D. F. R. S. supposing, that little imperfection could lurk under such specious titles: but if I live to buy another new book, I shall pay more regard to my own judgment, than to the bookfeller's recommendation; for to tell you the truth Doctor your performance does not altogether answer the character with which it was honoured. I had not read far in your Preliminary Discourse, ere I formed a design of commencing your humble correspondent; the further I

read, the more my purpose was confirmed, which the better to execute, I waited on your bookseller again to procure some more of your pamphlets. To him I communicated my design of commencing hostilities against your writings. He benevolently wished me to take care of myself, alledging that I should find the Rev. Dr. Priestley an able antagonist. I like him the better for that, -said I, for there will be the more honour in contending with him; besides, there is some chance of his deeming me so diminutive as to leave me entirely possessed of the field, and that will be thought by many to be a complete victory on my side, that is, on the side of common sense.

As you, Sir, have engrossed the whole of rational religion on your side of the question, you cannot be offended if I lay claim to common sense as my companion. And now to clear the way to a fair field for our literary combat, permit me to tell you that I myself am not in the highest estimation for orthodoxy; nor have the Orthodox Dissenters so much as hinted a desire of my appearing your antagonist; neither have any of them such an high opinion of either my learning or abilities, as to suppose me capable of discomfiting the Rev. Dr. Priestley. On the contrary, I am credibly informed that many of them are exceedingly grieved at my precipitancy and fool-hardiness in daring to attack a gentleman so very much my superior in all respects. Whether these

good people tremble with a pious fear for the ark of the Lord, or indulge a secret envy against me for assuming honour so eminent, and are afraid that I may appear in a more advantageous point of view than they could wish, I have not as yet been able to discover. But this I can assure you, that the undertaking is quite voluntary; therefore if a shameful defeat should in the issue be my lot, let the disgrace of it be candidly laid at my door, as a brat entirely of my own begetting.

As it is not my intention to call any names, to rake up the dust of any of the dead, or in the least to meddle with your private personal character, or education, which I believe has been much more liberal than that to which I have any pretensions. I beg we may have no talk of burning our bibles, or hanging, shooting, or drowning ourselves, as in the controversy between the Rev. Mr. Venn and yourself*, you politely have advised him to threaten in future. There will be no occasion for the least degree of personal abuse between you and me, if we both act up to our profession, *of simply seeking out the truth*. But as much study is a weariness of the flesh, it shall be lawful for us, now and then, to accompany our serious argument with a little ridicule, and to sneer jocosely at each other's folly; for which I perceive your reverence possesseth very

* Dr. Priestley's Letter to the Rev. Mr. Venn.

respectable talents, as appears from your letter to the Vicar of Huddersfield.

I blame the Protestant Dissenter for expressing his fear of your great abilities in point of ridicule ; seeing every one who engages in religious controversy must expect to meet with it, unless there be an happy defect of genius attending his antagonist. Religious controversies differ from all others in this, that they rouse up the little wit we are possessed of ; or, if destitute of wit, all the anger and ill-nature mixed with our constitution ; for it is no uncommon thing for religious combatants to leave the spirit of the gospel behind them, and by wrath to seek the righteousness of God : therefore, no man should enter into controversies of this sort without first sitting down and counting the cost, and trying his own heart whether he has temper enough to bear the poignance of that satire which he is likely to meet with, without injuring his cause by an unbecoming anger. Besides, as serious disquisitions are very tiresome to read, how does the Protestant Dissenter think that the reader can have patience to keep the disputants company, unless the muscles of his countenance are now and then relaxed into a pleasant grin by a home stroke of satirical wit ? But ill-nature being discovered, though it should be even religious ill-nature, is sure to give disgust to every reader of common understanding.

I confess that, of late years, I myself also am inclined to think that, to load infidels with epithets of reproach, is not the happiest method of attempting their conversion; and I hope to convince you, Sir, ere I have done, that, for the very same reason, Dr. Priestly takes the wrong way to lead the Orthodox Dissenters to correct the errors into which he supposes them to have fallen. Neither do I as yet see cause to be in any wise angry with a man, because God has not given him the same degree of rational discernment which I flatter myself he has conferred on me: nor would I scold at those who do not speak well of that gospel which, I believe in my heart to be hid from their eyes. If people are in circumstances dangerous to their everlasting concerns, they are certainly more proper objects of my pity than of my resentment. With as much propriety might I be offended at a poor man who was born blind and continues so, because he is not a judge of colours, or with a deaf man, because he understands not the harmony of sounds. But if one will take upon him to prate about colour which are only discernible by the eye, and the other will attempt to display the beauties of harmony which can only be perceived by the ear;—you know, Doctor, I may very consistently laugh at their folly, even whilst I pity them for their want of sight and hearing. However, I forbid all anger between you and me, as we are pretty

near upon a par in this respect, each of us firmly believing himself to be the furthest enlightened.

I am persuaded that two men cannot be found who in general differ more widely than Dr. Priestley and myself, and that too in the very fundamentals of the Christian faith, and yet there are some things in which we are perfectly agreed; and although I consider your system, in general, as utterly inconsistent with that gospel in which lies all my hope, I discern something in your writing that is worthy of imitation. The openness and freedom with which you express your sentiments, though frequently, as I think, crude and indigested, undoubtedly prove the uprightness of your intentions, and effectually exculpate you from the charge of dissimulation and wilful perversion of truth; which is further apparent from your readiness to correct what appears to you upon convincing evidence to have been wrong in former publications, as in your additions to the address on the Lord's supper. This symptom of genuine uprightness is so singular, and so rarely found in controversial writers, that I thought I could not do you justice, without taking particular notice of it, notwithstanding I profess myself an avowed enemy to what you call Rational Christianity. And I assure you, Sir, I hold myself obliged to follow *Dr. Priestley*, in this part of his conduct, whenever my circumstances shall call

me to it, which perhaps may be sooner than I at present expect. But, as it is quite unfashionable for polemic writers to stand long in bestowing panegyrics upon their antagonists, like counsellors at the bar, I proceed to inform you, that my present business is not to compliment much farther, but to point out more mistakes for your correction and amendment.

Having got in a great measure free, as I think, from the trammels of tradition myself, so as to regard no authority distinct from that of Christ in the scripture, and to follow no man, or set of men, knowingly, one hairsbreadth farther than he, or they follow the blessed Jesus; I should not have cared to enter the lists with you if you had not declared your belief of the scriptures as the only rule of faith and duty. For if fathers and reformers are admitted as decisive judges in religious controversy, the authority of the scriptures is not only abridged, and the Redeemer's glory, as prophet and lawgiver in his church eclipsed, but the subject is more perplexed, and the issue of the debate greatly protracted. I heartily concur with you in "believing the bible to be the only rule;" and to adopt your own words, sincerely "*wish that all persons, of all sects and parties, would study their bibles more, and books of controversy less**." Yet I shall have no objection to all people, of all sects, reading what may pass

* Considerations on Differences of Opinion, &c. pag. 24.

between you and me. I am ready to think, indeed that it is usual for polemic writers to suppose that all books of controversy are hurtful, except those, of which they themselves happen to be the authors. For instance, there is no man ever exclaimed more against controversy, as pernicious to the souls of men and the interests of true religion, than the reverend Mr *John Wesley*, and yet I do not know one man who has been more frequently dabbling in that polluting puddle, than *John Wesley*, A. M. sometime Fellow of *Lincoln-College*, Oxford.

The professed principle, Sir, upon which you set out page 1, of the Preliminary Discourse, is also very agreeable to me; and by it I mean to try the fabric you have built upon it; therefore shall recite it at large in this place; then I shall openly avow what I design in the following letters.

“ *Every set of religious sentiments must have its influence upon the mind, and will produce a particular temper and cast of thought, which will greatly influence the conduct. Christianity is by no means an exception to this general observation. Its effect upon the disposition of the mind is peculiar to itself: and except we FEEL as Christians, we cannot ACT as such*.*”

By this rule, let the religion of the Rev. Dr. Priestley and that of his humble servant be tried, and that which really produceth the

* Prel. Disc. pag. 3.

worst effects, be rejected as spurious, irrational, and unscriptural. Dependent upon the bible, a better rule could hardly have been given than this of your own. “*Every set of religious sentiments,*” rational and irrational, orthodox and heretical, *must have its influence upon the mind, and will produce a particular temper and cast of thought, which will greatly influence the conduct.*” “*Must,*” from the nature of things, and the relation between cause and effect; infomuch that from the temper and conduct of any man, you may from Dr. Priestley’s maxim, form an exact idea of the propriety or impropriety of his religious sentiments. You say, “*that Christianity is by no means an exception to this general observation:*” I hope not. For my part, I can form no idea of such a Christianity as hath not a proper influence upon those who cordially embrace it: of course, had I been in your place, I should have deemed this remark altogether superfluous and unnecessary. But I dare say, that you and I have very different views of Christianity itself, whatever agreement there may be between us respecting its effects upon the temper and conduct of its professors. The gospel which Paul preached, and the other gospel which he supposed some others might preach, are, no doubt, each of them productive of effects suitable to their different natures.

Having thus settled preliminaries, I will

now, Sir, point out the ground I intend to occupy, and the method by which the combat is to be managed; for I must assure you I am somewhat like the hero, who would fight only after his own country fashion.

1. I shall give you a little gentle correction for your want of charity for those same orthodox gentlemen, and teach you for the future, to use your betters either with more respect, or to be more consistent in your censure.

2. I design to prove that much of the Pharisee lurks under the specious name of Rational Dissenter, which you are pleased to assume, to distinguish yourself from others whom you call Orthodox.

3. I shall shew you how perplexed you have rendered the doctrines of the person of Christ, of the atonement, &c.

4. Give a little upon the visible, well-attested fruits of your divinity, as they discover themselves among the Rational Dissenters.

And, lastly, if any thing besides occur to me whilst I am discussing these points, I shall make no scruple of super-adding it to my plan.

Thus, Sir, I have gone as far as I intended in my first letter; so shall conclude, with assuring you that I am,

Reverend Sir,

Your very humble Servant.

LETTER II.

To the Rev. Joseph Priestley, LL. D. F. R. S.

Reverend Sir,

I AM abundantly the more careful in reciting the honours of your name, that the public may see the dignity of the company which I choose to keep; according to an ancient injunction laid upon me by my father, who had he lived to see this day, would have rejoiced that I had got such an honourable correspondent as yourself. I think, indeed, that by this time, we may esteem you as the most rational advocate of the Rational Dissenters, if we may judge by the eminent figure you make amongst them. I, for my part am, from the respectableness of your talents, very willing to believe that you are the fittest person with whom they could trust the management of their cause against all that are called Orthodox. But, in the name of common sense, and *rational religion*, what have the Orthodox Dissenters done to the Rev. Dr. Priestley, that he should set them forth in such a disagreeable point of view, and treat them in a manner so severe and unmerciful? Really, Doctor, you convince me, that you are but a man of like passions with myself, and not quite so free

from the prejudice of party as you seem to imagine. To make use of your own words*, I really think that “*we should naturally expect more fairness, more candour, more meekness, and more generosity from the Christian, than from the mere Man of this world. The passions of the latter (the man of this world) would be apt to run into personal animosity, envy, jealousy, hatred, and malice; whereas the utmost zeal of the former (the Christian) would not only ever appear to be consistent with, but would be greatly productive of the most disinterested benevolence, and the most affectionate brotherly love. By this rule, we may, in some measure, Try the Spirits whether they be of God. But let the utmost diffidence and candour accompany every judgment we form, remembering that we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.*” This is certainly a good rule; and I would observe upon it, that if we could only govern our spirits, as well as we do our pens, and act as well as we speak, there would be more propriety in our conduct than there usually is, and our character in life would be more respectable.

This being given as one of Dr. Priestley’s standing rules, “*for the finding out of spirits;*” upon seeing it, one would have thought that even the Orthodox Dissenters should have met with nothing from his distinguished pen but the utmost candour, meekness, generosity,

* Differences of Opinion, page 5.

benevolence and brotherly affection, which he himself lays down as the fruits of a Christian spirit; especially when we find him so solemnly and seriously deprecating a departure from this rule in the following words *. *God forbid that I should take upon me to condemn any of his creatures. Himself only knows our hearts, and he will render to every man according to his works.* But either the Orthodox Dissenters are thought not to be the creatures of God, or the Rev. Dr. Priestley was of a different opinion when he wrote the *Preliminary Discourse concerning the Spirit of Christianity*. I am not absolutely sure which of these was the case; but this I am certain of, that in the said Discourse, page 16, and 17, having traced the spring of the “*penances, and tiresome repetition of Paternoster’s and Ave Maria’s, as a mere bodily exercise, in the Church of Rome, and observed that it is pretty evident that going to church and attending prayers, is considered by many members of the Church of England in the same light. You remark that, this they look upon in the highest, and most proper sense their duty, and they hardly ever attend to it as the means of cultivating good dispositions, and fitting them for proper conduct in life.*” But it not being deemed sufficient to point out the absurdity of the papists, and of the good people of the Church of England, you go on to deal the severest blows among the poor Ortho-

* Diff. of Opinion, page 4.

dox Dissenters, as abundantly worse, and more dangerous than both the others; “*and, say you, the frequent long and severe exercises, by which the Orthodox Dissenters distinguish themselves, are of the same nature. They serve to discharge their consciences as a positive duty; but have little influence to improve their disposition and conduct.*” From a man of such moderation as the Rev. Dr. Priestley gives himself out to be, this might have been thought sufficient: but the home blow is yet to come; and thus it follows: “*Upon the whole, I cannot help thinking that there is a striking resemblance between these professors of Christianity, and the pharisees in our Saviour’s time, those who strained at a gnat and swallowed a camel; who devoured widows houses, and for a pretence, made long prayers; and that, were our Lord again upon the earth, he would treat them with the same severity. Indeed Doctor! Is it possible that the impulse is so strong, that you cannot resist it, but must out with it, in opposition to all your own excellent rules of meekness, candour, and benevolence. Could not you have recollected that just remark*, “we are certainly all of us fallible, and liable to adopt opinions without sufficient evidence;” This rule would have pleaded somewhat with you in favour of the poor Orthodox Dissenters, had it been observed; and I have not, for my part, skill enough to*

* See Dr. Priestley’s *Difference of Opinion*, page 31.

account for it, why great men should lay down the best of maxims and rules for others to follow, without paying a becoming regard to them themselves. I find myself just now under an impulse also, and cannot help saying that the above serious admonition * seems pretty near as necessary to the Rev. Dr. Priestley, as to the Rev. Mr. Venn, Vicar of Huddersfield; for his severity to the Deists, &c. is thoroughly matched by yours, Sir, towards the Orthodox Dissenters. What an inconsistent creature is man! for this same Dr. Priestley, who takes upon him to accuse, judge, and condemn the Orthodox Dissenters, tells us plainly †, “*that there are such well known instances of the force of prejudice, that he had rather ascribe any opinion, how absurd soever, or any defence, how weak soever, in a man how sensible, and intelligent soever, in other respects, to wrong judgment,*

* The admonition referred to is found in Dr. Priestley's Observations on Difference of Opinion, page 5, “We should naturally expect more fairness, more candour, more meekness, and more generosity from the Christian, than from the mere Man of this World. The passions of the latter would be apt to run into personal animosity, envy, jealousy, hatred, and malice; whereas the utmost zeal of the former would, not only ever appear to be consistent with, but would be greatly productive of the most disinterested benevolence, and the most affectionate brotherly love. By this rule we may, in some measure, try the spirits whether they be of God. But let the utmost diffidence and candour accompany every judgment we form, remembering that we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.”

† Differences of Opinion, page 10.

than to a bad heart;" and, after all most certainly ascribes the conduct and principles of these same Orthodox Dissenters to badness of heart, rather than wrong judgment; for there are said to be a striking likeness between them and the pharisees, who undoubtedly were influenced by badness of heart rather than misinformed judgments. "*How should I be affected at the great day of judgment,*" says your reverence * "*to be convinced of the integrity, and perhaps the right judgment also of an adversary, whom I should have treated in so illiberal and insulting a manner?*" This is intended for Mr. Venn's consideration; and I assure you, Doctor, I think it will not be altogether amiss that you should a little ponder upon it yourself: for to give good advice to others, and to neglect it ourselves, is somewhat like the conduct of watermen, who look one way whilst they are rowing another.

Nevertheless, I assure you, that I by no means impute this inconsistency of yours to any dishonesty of design, but to "*the force of prejudice, and wrong judgment,*" which has led you to throw out your censure, without fully considering its weight and propriety; or indeed how grievously it clasheth with your own avowed maxims.

Now, Doctor, that you may see the full scope of your censure referred to, I shall be free enough to animadvert upon it in my own

* Page 11.

way: and, in the first place, touching what you say of the Pater-nosters and Ave-Marias of the Church of Rome, and the prayers of many of the members of the Church of England being mere bodily exercises, I have little to say, having not yet attained to an absolute certainty whether all that have used these things had no farther views in them than merely to discharge their consciences. Besides, I have but a very dull faculty, in point of discerning hearts, any other way than by outward actions; moreover, I think it not amiss to leave it to the parties concerned to defend themselves against your attack, seeing neither of them have retained me as their advocate. But, as for the poor Orthodox Dissenters; you have used them so unmercifully Doctor, that common humanity would induce me to interfere, had I even no fellow-feeling with them in the common cause.

“ *The frequent long and severe exercises by which the Orthodox Dissenters distinguish themselves, are of the same nature.*” As to the frequency of their exercises, really you must needs be mistaken; for, to my certain knowledge, they differ little if any thing at all, from the exercises of the Rational Dissenters themselves. Verily, Sir, it is my charitable opinion, that few, of either the one or the other, are in danger of damnation for preaching too often and praying too much. But their exercises are *long* you say, and this per-

haps may be thought to give them a papistical turn. In this also I am of opinion, that the practice of the Rationals themselves will exculpate the Orthodox. *Your* exercises, Doctor, will measure pretty near two hours in length; the exercises of the Orthodox, generally speaking, never exceed, and very rarely extend to that time: so that I direct the jury who are to determine in the case, I mean the public, to bring in their verdict, *Not Guilty*, in favour of the Orthodox. The greatest danger is likely to arise from the third quality of their exercises, namely, their severity, which is by far the most puzzling point, as the Orthodox and Rational Dissenters, I much fear are not very likely at present, perfectly to understand one another. Some of them, however will be ready to alledge, that they enjoy as much pleasure in preaching the gospel, as Dr. Priestley does in his philosophical researches, and that they are apprehensive of no more severity in the one than he is of in the other. Nay, they would be apt to go farther, and to assure you, that the most pleasant part of their lives is that which is employed in the work of the sanctuary. Now, really, Sir, it is not easy to say, how that exercise in which a man delights, can be thought by him to be severe: and I suppose you will allow that every man by his own feelings ought to be the most proper judge for himself. Far be it from me, by the way, to

take upon me to determine the exact measure of severity, which those gentlemen feel in religious exercises, who are ministers merely for the sake of a livelihood. In general, it is a stated law, *That all currying against the grain is unpleasant*; but what is this to those who, having themselves felt the terrors of the Lord are stirred up to warn men to flee from the wrath to come? Upon whom necessity is laid, and who are miserable, if they preach not the gospel? They are constrained by the love they bear to Jesus and to the souls of men, to be instant in preaching the word in season and out of season, if by any means they may be useful in promoting the salvation of lost perishing sinners. The case you know is very different between these two sets of men; and of course, their feelings must also be different.

But, “ *these severe exercises of the Orthodox Dissenters are of the very same nature with popish penances, and tiresome repetitions of Pater-nosters, and Ave-Marias.* O! Doctor, where was your candour, your benevolence, and your brotherly affection, when you wrote this discourse? Indeed Sir, if Rational Religion doth not find out a more happy method of discovering herself, I shall never be able to join any of her societies, but must even be content to bear the reproach of Orthodoxy. But, you know, and I know too, that popish penances, tiresome repetitions of paternosters, &c. are enjoined in the church of Rome

with a view to procure the favour of God, &c. And you say that the frequent, long, and severe exercises of Orthodox Dissenters are of the same nature. Permit me to ask you if you really think that the same Orthodox Dissenters perform their severe exercises with a design to merit at the hands of God? Perhaps, Sir, you may recollect who it is that blames them for pharisaism, for considering themselves as saved, and secure in the favour of the Almighty, whilst they suppose that multitudes are under his wrath, and must perish. Turn, I pray you, good Doctor, to page 18 of your Differences of Opinion, and there see the sentiments of the Orthodox, as “*that the grace that saves them is irresistible and irrevocable, so that they can never lose the divine favour.*” Certainly these words, if they contain their sentiments, must utterly exclude all pretensions to merit in their severe exercises: and how then can one of your professed candour say, that their exercises: are of the very same nature with popish penances and paternosters? I really wish, that our zeal for party-religion might not in future be injurious to common sense as well as Christian charity.

I pray you, Sir, how came you so well to know, that their frequent, long, and severe exercises have little influence to improve their disposition and conduct? You know well enough that your acquaintance with the gene-

rality of them is comparatively narrow, and your intercourse with them very small. And perhaps your acquaintance with any of them is too imperfect to authorise such a scandalous stigma as this with which you brand them. Admitting that you have tasted of the bitterness of some of their spirits, and have smarted by lashes from the pens of one or two individuals among them, will that be a sufficient warrant for such a general and indiscriminating censure with you pass upon them all? When do you think, Doctor, that you and I shall learn, in our controversies, to do to others as we would wish them to do unto us? That is, to act up to our own salutary rules. But, as you say concerning the Deists, I may say concerning the Orthodox Dissenters; do, Sir, sit down calmly, and with seriousness consider their objections to your Rational religion, and by no means treat them with that contempt which they do not deserve.

The answer to the heaviest part of the charge you bring against them, must be left till I have the honour of writing to you again; for I will not trouble you with too long a letter at one time, lest the exercise of reading it should be thought somewhat severe, like the religion of the Orthodox. I shall therefore conclude, remaining,

Reverend Sir,

Your humble servant,

LETTER III.

Reverend Sir,

I HAVE not yet done with animadverting on the uncharitable censure you have passed against the Orthodox Dissenters; therefore, to make you sensible that you are not such a competent judge of men, and of the spirits which influence them, as some may think, my business in this letter shall be to point out the real import of the dreadful sentence you have pronounced against them, so as that all may read and understand it. But, as I would do the strictest justice to all men living, I purpose to keep up a proper distinction between Dr. Priestley as a Rational Christian, and the same Dr. Priestley as an honest man, and whilst I muster all my forces to oppose him under the former character, I shall give him all due honour and respect under the latter. With this necessary distinction therefore in my eye, I shall proceed to shew that the Rev. Dr. Priestley, as a Rational Dissenter, has drawn the most detestable picture of, and brought the heaviest accusations against the Orthodox Dissenters, that I remember ever to have seen or heard; and by the way,

That the same Rev. Dr. Priestley, as a man of philosophic candour and humanity,

has boldly acquitted the said Orthodox of all the charges brought against them by the Rational Dissenter, by his pointing out another class of people, to whom his censure is perfectly applicable.

1. Then, Doctor, for I love to be methodical, let us take a view of the charge which you, as a Rational Dissenter, bring against the Orthodox, and we shall find it truly alarming; perfectly unmixed with that amiable charity, so justly celebrated in your performances. *Upon the whole I cannot help thinking, that there is a striking resemblance between these professors of Christianity, and the pharisees in our Saviour's time, those who strained at a gnat and swallowed a camel, who devoured widows houses, and, for a pretence, made long prayers; and that were our Lord again upon the earth, he would treat them with the same severity *.*

Why the pharisees in our Saviour's time should be chosen as the original, after which the picture of the Orthodox Dissenters is drawn, I cannot certainly say; having had but little opportunity of informing myself whether there is any real dissimilitude between the ancient and the modern pharisees. However, were a skilful limner to copy the spirit and conduct of the pharisees of our own time, he would produce a picture even disagreeable and shocking enough, without having the trouble and expence of travelling back the

* Preliminary Discourse, page 17.

space of seventeen centuries for a more perfect pattern. Now that we may the better know whether the Orthodox, or the Rational Dissenters have the clearest title to the honour of being classed with the pharisees in our Saviour's time, it may not be amiss for me to take down the *original* from behind the curtain, and a little to mark the outlines of that distinguished character. This may bring the matter to a fair issue; and I believe I shall not need to put myself to much expence or to the trouble of severe study in this affair; for I have got what suits my purpose in an old sermon of mine: for you must know, Sir, that I am, like yourself, "paid for haranguing the people once a week." I think you will agree with me that the Rational Dissenter, has discovered but a very slender degree of that charity, which doctor Priestley so warmly recommends when he so positively declares that, there is such a striking resemblance between the Orthodox Dissenters and the pharisees; for,

1. The pharisees, in general, were hypocrites; and, as appears from the testimony of Jesus, took up a dissembled religion to cover their avaricious purposes; which must be the character of the Orthodox Dissenters, if the resemblance between them and the pharisees is so striking as you, Sir, in the person of a Rational Dissenter, have been pleased to affirm; but, how you could come at this knowledge, with-

out having attained the wonderful secret of discerning hearts, is not so easy for me to comprehend. But the Rev. Dr. Priestley, in the person of an honest man, is absolutely of a different opinion; for, to the confusion of this uncharitable Rational Dissenter, he tells us plainly, that *
“ he would at any time rather impute the mistaken conduct of the Orthodox Dissenters to wrong judgment than to badness of heart,”
 But, if the whole had not been imputed to badness of heart, this Rational Dissenter had not been so exceedingly and irresistibly struck with the exact resemblance. For my own part, I most sincerely agree with Doctor Priestley the honest man, and am so sensible *“ that we are all fallible, and liable to adopt opinions, without sufficient evidence †, that I should not dare even to retort any thing which apparently carried in it a charge of hypocrisy.”*
 Therefore I signify it as my opinion, that the exhibiter of this charge against the Orthodox be summoned to the bar of the Rational Dissenters, and on his knees receive a sharp rebuke for having betrayed their want of candour and charity, which ought by all means to have been kept a secret, as they wish for the prosperity of Rational religion. Indeed, Sir, it never was my intention to charge your friends with hypocrisy; but if Dr. Priestley, who is so much better acquainted with them than I am, will do it, the blame you know

* Diff. of Opin. page 10.

† Differences of Opinion, page 31.

can, with no propriety, be laid at my door. And, to my certain knowledge, what the Doctor says of them, can with no justice be said of many who are called Orthodox. That all may see that I do not belie you, Reverend Sir, I shall lay before the reader your own words, and then leave it to his determination, whether they actually amount to a direct charge of dissimulation and hypocrisy. In your essay on Church Discipline, page 55. speaking of the Rational Dissenting ministers, you say, that they “*entertaining sentiments in religion different from those of their people, and such as their people would not have borne with; they endeavoured to keep them as much as possible out of view.*” This is a very fair and honest confession indeed! In the truth and uprightness of your heart you have displayed the dissingenuous conduct of your learned brethren, without any regard had to the consequences which might attend such a fatal discovery. I own, however, that it is somewhat droll that the Rational Dissenters should be the only people who are unacquainted with the real sentiments of their ministers; and it is every whit as droll that one of themselves should publish the tremendous secret, “*that their ministers are so wrapt in disguise when they come to the pulpit, that it is impossible for the congregation to know of a truth that they are entertained with the real sentiments of the preacher.*” This is one of the many advantages arising from the further reformation of

religion. And really it is pretty clear that these same Rational gentlemen differ exceedingly from Paul the apostle, who shunned not to declare the whole counsel of God. For my own part I have not been accustomed to entertain such a very mean opinion of the Rational ministers, but I dare not reject such testimony, as that of the Rev. Dr. Priestley. Were I a person who loved to hear an evil report of others, as some people do, I should be very apt to think that such men were hypocrites like the pharisees; but happily for me, Sir, you have saved me that trouble and mortification by bringing home the charge upon them yourself. *“If the minister be a man of integrity, he will always preach, at least consistently with his real sentiments*.”* Indeed one would think so; and from hence it will be inferred that if those, who are men of integrity, will all of them always preach consistently with their real sentiments it must follow that those who keep their real sentiments as much as possible out of view, cannot be men of integrity; that is, they must be dissemblers, for they dissemble their sentiments. This is very much like hypocrisy; but I will not absolutely affirm that the gentlemen are hypocrites. Now, really Sir, such is my extensive charity for you, that I could almost find in my heart to believe, that you made use of the name *“Orthodox Dissenters,”* as

* Church Discipline, page 109.

a cover to your real designs ; and that, whilst you say here is a striking resemblance between the Orthodox and the pharisees, you all the while mean the *Rational Dissenting ministers*, whom you did not chuse to offend ; and therefore cared not to mention them by name. And I think this is the most favourable point of view in which I can consider your censure, — when I turn it into an honest, well designed artifice for correcting the vices of your brethren ; between whom and the pharisees there seems to be a very considerable likeness in point of hypocrisy, provided that your account of them is picturesque and genuine.

2. The pharisees, in our Saviour's time, gloried so much in their personal attainments, that they could come even to the divine throne, and each of them boast of his own worthiness, saying, *God, I thank thee that I am not as other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.* And Doctor Priestley I hope will give me leave to assert, that those Dissenters, who may truly be called experimental ; that is, in the better sense of the word, Orthodox, are so far from this spirit, that they freely confess themselves to be the vilest of the vile. You very well know, Sir, who they are that assume the name of Rational, by which they would be understood to be more enlightened than their neighbours. One would really think that this is in some measure like the spirit of those gentlemen among

the Jews, who said concerning Jesus of Nazareth, have any of the rulers or of the pharisees believed in him? But as for those people who know not the law, they are accursed. The Doctor's writings furnish instances enough, how much he is enlightened above his fellows, and especially above the Orthodox race, who do not, in his esteem, understand the scriptures, and the religion therein contained. It is really a difficult matter to account for human conduct in general, or for your's and mine in particular, Sir, for whilst you are pleased to charge the Orthodox Dissenters with pharisaism, and of saying to others, "Stand by yourselves, we are more holy than you," you are also pleased to lead us to behold, in the persons of the Rational Dissenters themselves, the very descendants of the pharisees in the time of our Saviour. Self-veneration, according to both Dr. Priestley and myself, is one essential part of the character of a pharisee. That this veneration for one's self and party, is, in any peculiar manner, the characteristic of the Orthodox Dissenters, remains for the Doctor to prove at his leisure; but that it belongs properly to the Rational Dissenter, I hope his own words will be thought a very sufficient evidence; at least, with me it weighs mightily. Says the Rational Dissenter, in his Discourse Preliminary to the Essay on Church Discipline, pages 28 and 29, "*I am clearly of opinion that the character of those who may*

be called the more free livers (i. e. the more loose and prophane, according to the vulgar dialect) *among the Rational Dissenters, is, with respect to the true spirit of Christianity, superior to that of those who are seemingly, the more devout of the other sort,*" (i. e. of the Orthodox Dissenters). That this passage is not quite so clear of the spirit of the pharisee as the author could wish to have it believed, I think will appear from our considering that he hath not been candid enough to admit even the sincerity of the Orthodox in their devotion, but has represented them as only *seemingly more devout.*" It is not given us as a rash expression or inadvertent slip of the pen ; for he tells us, that "*he is clearly of this opinion ;*" therefore, I proceed to give the true sense of the passage in my way, and it may be thus expressed. The Rev. Dr. Priestley is clearly of opinion that the most loose, and irreligious of those who think as he does, *alias* Rational Dissenters, possess more of the true spirit of Christianity, *i. e.* are better men than the strictest livers, or the most devout amongst the Orthodox. Whether this is not the depth of self-adulation, and the very spirit of the pharisees, a small degree of intelligence will enable every reader to determine. By the way, neighbour, I should never have concerned myself with the beam which is in the eye of the Rational Dissenter, had not your

reverence so grievously magnified the mote that is in the eye of the Orthodox.

3. Another part of the character of the pharisees, is, that being ignorant of God's righteousness, they went about to establish their own, which is by the law, making void the righteousness of God, which is by faith in Jesus Christ. They had such a fond opinion of their own personal virtue and holiness, that they saw no need of Christ's righteousness imputed to justify, or his blood to atone, but took it for granted that they were very sufficient of themselves *under the common assistances of the deity* *," to do every thing necessary for procuring the favour of God and the pardon of their sins. What a conflict is here between your treatise on Church Discipline, and your Considerations on Differences of Opinion? The common oppositions to which all Christian people are exposed from their unbelieving enemies, are thought by some to be heavy enough to bear; but how much harder must it be, when a man becomes his own opposer, as in the case of the Rev. Dr. Priestley? His Treatise on Discipline very charitably affirms, that there is a striking resemblance between the Orthodox Dissenters and the pharisees, in our Saviour's time. I have shewn, that the pharisees in our Saviour's time, sought salvation, only by the works of the law; and you, Sir, are so obliging, in your considerations

* Dr. Priestley's words.

on Different Opinions, page 18, as to demonstrate, that the Orthodox Dissenters are so far from depending on personal virtue, or the works of the law, that they believe, *that the universal parent arbitrarily selected out of the whole number, a few, whom he designs for eternal happiness: and that, according to them, even the elect cannot be saved, till the utmost effects of the divine wrath have been suffered for them by an innocent person. The grace that saves them is irresistible and irrevocable, so that they can never loose the divine favour.*" Whether this account of the faith of the Orthodox be perfectly just, or in some measure warped out of the way of truth, is not the object of my present enquiry. It is enough for me to shew thereby that, the same Doctor who brings the heavy charge against the Orthodox Dissenters, does in a very candid manner exculpate them from the guilt insinuated; as the passage above recited, even in your own sense of it, stands opposed to the tenets and spirit of the pharisees. In short, Doctor, we shall be obliged to go somewhere else to look for this same striking resemblance of the pharisees; for we have not as yet been able to find it according to your wish, among the Orthodox Dissenters.

It is indeed remarkable that Dr. Priestley should represent the Orthodox as holding *the opinion that men are entirely passive in the work of conversion and the new birth, entirely*

*incapable of themselves so much as to think a good thought ; and that saving faith consists in an acceptance of, or a dependence upon the merits of Christ for salvation, or what they are fond of calling, throwing themselves upon Christ, or a resting upon Christ for salvation *.*" And yet, in his additional observations on the Lord's supper, page 28, *to represent them as pleading and proclaiming their own goodness.*" How could you, for shame, Doctor, make your appeal to common sense, in your letter to Mr. Venn? Had you taken her advice, she would have made your writings as uniform, as they are well designed. But, because you have affronted her, she hath forsaken you; and you will easily guess where, I suppose that she hath taken up her dwelling.

Now, Sir, as you and I are engaged in the same pursuit, I mean to find out the real descendants of the pharisees in our Lord's time, and each of us hopes for success in his own way; will you give me leave to try how the coat will fit the Rational Dissenters themselves. The pharisees then could form no idea of the new birth and conversion, as a work of the spirit of God, in which the subject himself is passive. This is exactly the case with the Rational Dissenters. And both the parents and children say, "How can these things be?" The pharisees knew and believed that Jesus was a teacher sent from God; for

* Preliminary Discourse, page 14.

they knew that no man could do the works which he did, except God were with him. This believing that Jesus was a teacher sent from God, you say, implies the whole of Rational Christianity.

The pharisees held it to be blasphemy in Jesus to make himself equal with God, he being, as Dr. Priestley observes, and as they asserted, but “a man like ourselves.” The Rational Dissenters hold it as the greatest absurdity in us to adore the blessed Jesus as Jehovah’s fellow, seeing as they also say, he is but a man like ourselves. Indeed, Doctor, here is a wonderful likeness between their respectableness the pharisees in our Saviour’s time, and yourselves the Rational Dissenters. How could you then ascribe that honour to the Orthodox Dissenters, which is so clearly due to the Rationals?

You tell us, in the depth of your candour, “*that the pharisees strained at a gnat, and swallowed a camel, that they devoured widows houses, and for a pretence made long prayers, and that there is an exact resemblance between them and the Orthodox Dissenters*” *.

* This instance of Dr. Priestley’s penetration in finding out the likeness between the Orthodox Dissenters and the Pharisees who swallowed camels, devoured widows houses, and for a pretence made long prayers, may be of the greatest use to the curious, by enabling them to discover the full contents of every big Orthodox belly they meet with. For instance, whenever a curious Rational happens to meet with an Orthodox teacher bearing a prominent belly, he will be instantly struck with a

To be serious, Doctor, do you really think that the Orthodox Dissenters have such a wide swallow as that a whole camel will down at once? Are you certainly assured that they are the very devourers of widows houses which you represent them to be? and are you morally certain that all their long prayers are but a mere pretence? Think not to get off from the charge of uncharitableness, by alledging, that you laid not these things to the charge of the Orthodox Dissenters; seeing you assert that there is a striking resemblance between the one and the other, and give it as your opinion that Jesus would deal equally severe with the latter as with the former; which must, in your view, suppose an equality of demerit. Yea, Doctor, you are even so struck with the disagreeable likeness, that you cannot help publishing it, so that all may discern how much like the ancient pharisees you esteem the Orthodox Dissenters.

You tell us that "*if our Saviour was again to come upon the earth, he would treat them with the same severity with which he treated the pharisees.*" He denounced every curse and woe written in the law of God against the

conviction that the Orthodox Doctor is gorged with the widows houses which he has devoured. Had I the honour of being a Rational Dissenter, and found this to be the case, I would certainly shew them less than the little mercy they have received from the Doctor; for I would follow them with prosecutions *pro bono publico* till they had cast up every poor widow's house, which now lies in ruin with² them.

one; and, of course, in your charitable opinion, he would do the same by the other. If he would do it on supposition he was to come again upon earth, he will certainly do it now he is in heaven; for he is the same now that he was when in a state of humiliation, being Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to day, and for ever. Is not this somewhat like judging and determining upon the state of the Orthodox Dissenters? A thing, which you would not be thought to attempt for the world. O! Doctor, let me recommend to your serious consideration the wholesome advice which you so liberally bestow upon Mr Venn, respecting his want of love to those that differ from him.

The spring of this so unbecoming a censure of those, whom you are pleased sometimes to honour with the name of brethren, seems to be some irresistible impulse upon your mind; for you say, “*I cannot help thinking that there is a striking likeness, &c.*” I have heard of strange things concerning impulses which people *could not help* complying with; yea strange accounts of impulses, even to the greatest of evils, have been heard of; but I should not have expected to find a Rational Christian reduced to the necessity of bringing the heaviest accusation against those from whom he has the happiness to differ. However, Doctor, to advert to that leading principle, upon which both you and I set out, and

which is so well expressed in page 1, of your Preliminary Discourse, we may form some judgment of your set of sentiments by the influence it has upon your spirit and conduct. “*Every set of religious sentiments must have its influence upon the mind, and will produce a particular temper and cast of thought, which will greatly influence the conduct.*” Doctor Priestley finds himself under such an influence that he cannot help bringing the most grievous accusation against the Orthodox Dissenters; from whence it would seem that his set of religious sentiments has produced a very disagreeable temper and cast of thought in him; from which it is apparent, that *unless he feel like a Christian he cannot act as such.*

I am afraid I have been too tedious upon a subject, which cannot be the most agreeable to you; and therefore shall stop short before I have finished my design, lest the exercise should be too severe upon you, as well as upon

SIR,

Your humble Servant.

LETTER IV.

INDEED, Doctor, it is a certain truth, and all may depend upon it, that were I assured of having no other judge but yourself, I would much rather be a Deist, than an Orthox Dissenter, and that for reasons strong and substantial. Self-love and self-preservation are principles deeply rooted in me, and prompt me as it were by instinct to study my own safety; and you know, Sir, that it must be adviseable enough for me, to wish myself of that party to which the judge is apparently most favourable. That you have but little favour for the Orthodox Dissenters, is, by this time, pretty obvious; your tender mercies towards them are not altogether unmixed with cruelty; but your most cruel treatment of the deistical Gentlemen wants not a goodly share of that candour and compassion which the Orthodox Dissenters would be glad to participate. Your conduct towards the one has been sufficiently exemplified; I shall therefore consider what aspect it bears towards the other. *“ Let us then sit down to a serious and impartial examination of the objections of Deists to Christianity, and by no means treat them with that contempt and insolence which*

they have too often met with, and which they are very far from deserving. But before we attempt the vindication of any thing (to which the Deists object), let us first consider whether we have any occasion to vindicate it at all; that is, whether it really belongs to our religion, or whether it have only been generally supposed to belong to it *." Now, why should not the Orthodox be thought to deserve the same candid and serious consideration of their objections to the Rational scheme also, instead of being treated with that contempt and insolence which they by no means deserve? seeing such treatment is likely to operate upon them to as much disadvantage as upon the Rational, "*reflecting and irreproachable Deists*;" unless it is supposed, that, could these same gentlemen be brought over, they would make better and more Rational Christians than the Orthodox. For my own part, Doctor, seeing these same Deists are such a thinking irreproachable race, and their company of course so very desirable, I give it as my advice, that, if they will not come over to the Rational Dissenters, you and your good people would be complaisant enough to go over to them, or at least, to meet them half of the very little way which the Rev. Mr. Venn has shewn to be between you and the Deists.

I assure you, Sir, that I am very far from treating these respectable Deists with either

* Preface to *Considerations on the Lord's Supper*, p. 9.

infolence or contempt: I esteem them as the creatures of the same almighty hand that formed me; as the descendants of Adam, and my fellow sinners, I sincerely wish their everlasting welfare. To show that I am serious, in what I say, give me leave to take this method of whispering the following secret in your ear, and that is, “ I would rather chuse to live under the government of a Deist than that of either a Rational, or Orthodox Dissenter providing that they were bigots to their several parties.” I could give reasons for this my so singular a choice, if I was in the humour, but, at present, shall reserve them to myself, lest I should offend my good friends of every denomination. But, if these same Deists will take away the foundation of my hope, and revile the Saviour in whom is all my trust, if they will deride that word which is spirit and life to my soul, no man can expect that I shall account them my familiar friends, or choose them for my social companions. Christian love will never require this of me or any of its possessors. Indeed, Doctor, you were wrong to resent the discipline which the Rev. Mr. Venn so freely bestowed upon you, notwithstanding it might appear to a gentleman of your sensibility to be something too warm, seeing that, on this head, you certainly gave him room for some suspicion. Though, for my own part, I dissent from his judgment concerning you,

and do not believe you to be a Deist, nor a Pagan, nor an Athiest, but a mere Rational Dissenter, unestablished in any set of sentiments for or against Christianity, which the incoherence and indigestedness of your religious writings plainly testify. Moreover, I have conceived such an high opinion of your uprightness, that I expect, as soon as you become actually a Deist, to see a defence of the Rational system of Deism published by Joseph Priestley, L. L. D. F. R. S.

From whom the Deists have received this undeserved ill usage, you have not been pleased to inform us; but I have a strong suspicion that it must have been from the unmannerly Orthodox, seeing the Deists and Rational Dissenters are upon terms so friendly and sociable. However, I am perfectly agreed with you in this, that it is more becoming the Christian, whatever the desert of the Deists may be, to set down seriously, and consider their objections, than to treat them with contempt and insolence.

I now depart from the tents of Deism a little, to converse with the Rational Dissenters; a name both new and significant. I pray you, Doctor, who gave you this name; and for what was it bestowed upon your people? You say indeed, that it is by way of distinction: But I would know from whom it can distinguish you, except from such as are deemed irrational among the Dissenters? Will the

Rev. Dr. Priestley indeed affirm upon the word of an honest man, that there are none who may be called Rational among the Orthodox? Would not this be somewhat like self-conceit, and the spirit of the pharisee, who alone knows the law when all others are ignorant? When Orthodox is opposed to Rational, are we not under a necessity thereby to understand *irrational*? Then the distinction between Dissenters will be, *rational Dissenters* and *irrational Dissenters*. Who are the Rational Dissenters but those who believe as your reverence does; and who the irrational but those who differ from you? Is this that humble spirit which you tell us Christianity inspires? It is indeed natural for a man to consider his own set of sentiments as the more eligible and consistent, and it is desirable to be established in them, and fully persuaded in his own mind; but it argues much of the pharisee to suppose that we are so infallibly right as to deem them who differ from us irrational. If you were acquainted with me, Doctor, you would say that I have a very sufficient stock of vanity; and yet I assure you, that I am not vain enough to suppose that every particular article of my creed is perfectly rational and consistent; however, when any one article is proved to me to be irrational and inconsistent with the gospel of Jesus, it hath no longer place in my confession.

To dismiss this head I shall produce an au-

thority which will by no means countenance the assumption of that honourable appellation by any one sect of professors to the disparagement of those of other persuasions. “ *We are all fallible, and liable to adopt opinions without sufficient evidence.*” Dr. Priestley.

“ *All sects and parties agree in the great duties of the human life; they equally know what it is that the Lord our God requires of us.*” Dr. Priestley.

Now if we are all equally fallible as you intimate, how comes it that one has a right to assume a name expressive of higher illumination than his fellows?

If all sects equally know what it is that the Lord our God requires of us, let the Doctor tell me in what his sect is more Rational than their neighbours? Indeed, Sir, there is a vast resemblance of the pharisee here, and proof sufficient that you have not as yet attained a perfect conformity to your own excellent aphorisms.

I am amazed to find a gentleman of your high pretensions to distinguished reason giving such a confused account of the Redeemer's person; it is indeed a difficult matter to find out whether, what you call the Rational scheme, or that of the Orthodox is most favoured in the hints referred to in your writings, which it must be owned, establish neither. You tell us “ *that our Lord took it for granted that his disciples would form*

themselves into such societies, and that those powers, of admonition, censure, and excommunication, would be assumed and exercised.*”

This appears to me to be more injurious to the honour of Jesus, and more unfavourable to the divine institution of churches and church discipline, than perhaps was designed by the writer. This *taking it merely for granted that they would form themselves, &c.* makes the constitution of churches to be no more than a voluntary act of men, without divine appointment rather than an institution of the great prophet and head of the church. If we lose the idea of divine appointment in the formation and government of gospel churches, by what means can order and discipline be enforced? But we are informed that Jesus continued forty days with his disciples, after his resurrection, before he ascended to heaven, teaching them the things concerning the kingdom of God. That is, as I apprehend, concerning a gospel church state; and from the procedure of the disciples immediately after his ascension, in forming themselves into an orderly society, and establishing a code of discipline, it would seem that the former instructions, and injunctions of their ascended Lord were the only things which had led them to it. Allow me to say that this part of the apostles conduct without an express command immediately from Jesus himself, or mediately by the Holy

* Discipline pag. 121.

Ghost, as the spirit of Jesus, would have been equally impious with the kindling of strange fire on the altar for which the sons of Aaron were slain by the hand of the Omnipotent. A certain knowledge of the divine will was necessary in order to their entrance upon a church establishment, and who is he that reveals this will unto us but the great “Teacher sent from God?” To talk therefore of his taking it for granted, is vague and inconsistent. Moreover, it is highly derogatory to his personal honour, and supposeth that he was not morally * certain that they would thus form themselves into a church state, only took it for granted; whereas the very passage you there refer to, “*tell it to the church,*” evidently shews that his disciples had been instructed already in this part of their duty; and, if instructed, it must have been by him. This *taking it barely for granted*, leaving a doubt behind concerning the extent of the Redeemer’s knowledge very ill agrees with that memorable confession of Peter so unfavourable to your Rational religion, “*Lord, thou knowest*

* This distinction between taking a thing merely for granted and being morally certain of it, by some may be thought not to be sufficiently founded in fact; I shall offer in its defence a fact which may be depended upon. When I first read some of Dr. Priestley’s philosophical works, I took it for granted that a mind so expanded as his could never descend to show a mean resentment of the conduct of those who differ from him in matters of religion: but the issue has sufficiently shewn that I was very far from being morally certain that this was precisely the case.

all things;” all things past, present, or future; all things in heaven, earth, or hell; all things created and uncreated *. Whether it is safest for us to subscribe Peter’s confession “that Jesus even before his ascension knew all things,” or Dr. Priestley’s, which says “that Jesus is but a man like ourselves,” and that he took it for granted his disciples would form themselves into such societies, &c. I shall leave my reader to determine. This favourite phrase “That Jesus Christ is only a man like ourselves” you have been pleased frequently to introduce. I also rejoice that Jesus is a man like myself: but I dare not assert as you do, that he is only a man like myself, having both the scriptures and Dr. Priestley’s own testimony to evince the contrary; as I shall shew in its proper place.

There is a very remarkable passage in your Preliminary Discourse, pag. 5. and which for its singularity, I cannot well pass over without remark. “*It was probably an attempt to connect Christianity with these (pagan) hypotheses that first suggested the idea of Jesus Christ having been a pre-existent, super-angelic*

* When things uncreated are spoken of, the author does not intend that things possible to have been created, or that may hereafter be created should be understood, but the Creator himself in his revealed subsistencies, and undescrivable perfections of his nature. Believing firmly that God cannot be perfectly known but by God himself, and that Jesus being said to know all things is such a proof of his proper deity, as all the enemies of that doctrine fight against as men who beat the air,

spirit, the creator and governor of this world." It may be so, Doctor; but if it is, it will reflect but little honour upon the great apostle of the gentiles who evidently suggests the idea of Jesus Christ having been a pre-existent being by whom the world was made and supported, Col. i. 15, 16, 17. *Who is the image of the invisible God, the first born of every creature: for by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him and for him; and he is before all things, and by him all things consist.* Now, as I have no other way of knowing what a writer means but by attending closely to the manner in which he expresseth himself, I am obliged to abide by the obvious sense of the words he makes use of, which in this place and several others plainly suggest the idea of Christ's existence before his incarnation and being born of a virgin. And yet one would really think that this holy apostle had no view to accomodate Christianity to pagan systems of philosophy, seeing Chap. ii. ver. 8. he strictly chargeth the Colossians to "*Beware lest any man should spoil them through philosophy and vain deceit after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of this world and not after Christ.*" He must have acted very deceitfully, and very inconsistently, if he was studying to reconcile Christianity with any

pagan hypothesis whatever, when he so warmly cautions to guard against the effects of their vain philosophy; one would really be tempted to think that he dreaded nothing more than such an accommodation.

However I am not certain whether your design in this place be to combat your friends the Arians, who indeed hold that Christ was such a pre-existent spirit as you speak of, or your old friends the Orthodox, who consider him as having eternally existed as the God of angels; only, from your known attachment to the latter, it is presumed that you will omit no opportunity of paying your compliments to them. As for the Arians, they are certainly nearer the truth, than their more Rational brethren who assert that Jesus had no existence prior to his being born of the virgin; and as for the Orthodox, they are kept tolerably in countenance by that declaration of Jesus himself, “*Before Abraham was, I am.*” And however Dr. Priestley understands these words, it is plain, the Jews blind and irrational as they were, understood him, as, although not fifty years old, making himself older than their father Abraham, and so strongly expressive of his existence before his incarnation, that they thought he deserved death for such a declaration. Notwithstanding, Doctor, to give you your due, you have greatly confirmed the Orthodox in their sen-

timents before you finish that ridiculous paragraph. But more of this hereafter.

Page 7. of the same Discourse yields us an instance of singular Rationality, in placing the worship of Jesus Christ on a level with the worship of dead men, and as extinguishing the true idea of the Divine character and government. “*When the worship of dead men, saints, and angels, as well as that of Jesus Christ was introduced, the true idea of the Divine character and government was wholly lost.*” That the worship of dead men, saints, and angels, is, comparatively of a late date, and that the introduction of such idolatry into the Christian church, naturally tended to efface the true idea of the Divine character and government, will not be denied by the Orthodox: but it must require sagacity, not inferior to yours, to find out a likeness between this idolatry and the worship of Jesus Christ. Must we indeed account the worship of the son of God equally idolatrous with that of *Thomas a Becket*, and other dead men among the papists? It occurs to my mind however that the worship of dead men, saints, and angels, is expressly against both the letter and spirit of scripture; whereas the worship of Jesus Christ is as expressly enjoined in holy writ; it is therefore far from being a proof of the strictest accuracy in the Rev. Dr. Priestley in placing them, as in this sentence, on a level. I should be glad to know who these

faints are that you speak of as the objects of worship, whether they are dead men, or living men, or indeed of the human specie at all; for as you are pleased to distinguish them both from angels and dead men, I am not a little puzzled to find out who are intended, “*When the worship of dead men, saints, and angels as well as that of Jesus Christ, was introduced, the true idea of the Divine character and government was wholly lost.*” Really, Doctor! But are you serious? Does the beholding of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth, deprive us of the true idea of the Father himself? One would really think that there is no method so likely for us to come at the true idea of the Father, the end, as beholding him through his Son the way which leads to him. We, for our parts, know no other way of coming to the Father, but by Jesus Christ, though it seems that Dr. Priestley and the rest of the Rationals have got a nearer way. Nevertheless, I will not affirm that you and your friends worship dead men any more than we do; but I have known some Rational Dissenters as well as Orthodox ere now very remarkable for their devotion to living men; which is pretty near as preposterous as the other worship. I wish you would tell me, Doctor, when it was that the worship of Jesus Christ was introduced; for I find it to have been of long standing very current in the days of the apostles, practised by many in the

days of his own flesh, and always acceptable when the worshipper came to him in a right spirit. Indeed there is one instance of his putting a check upon a certain worshipper, who came to him under mistaken views of his person: he was a rational polite Jewish gentleman, virtuous and pious in his own way; one who considered Jesus to be only a man like himself; yet, as a teacher sent from God, to reform the people, and point out the path of duty to them. Coming to Jesus with great swelling words of respect in his mouth, such words as were applicable to none who had not a personal claim to proper deity; the divine teacher put him in mind, that, if he entertained such low notions of his person, his eulogy was absurd, seeing God alone is essentially good. Some people there are who suppose that the worship of the Rational Dissenters is near a-kin to this, and are very apprehensive that it will meet with the same acceptance.

Dear Sir, what indignation must have filled your breast, had your reverence stood by when Thomas the apostle worshipped and adored Jesus as *his Lord and his God*? And how would you have blamed Jesus, "who you say is only a man like yourself," for receiving this high adoration which could not be due to him in your view of things? Two things appear to me to be very remarkable in this instance of the worship of Jesus Christ.

1. Thomas acted just as if he had been an

Orthodox Dissenter, in *worshipping Christ as Lord and God*, who Dr. Priestley tells us, “*is but a man like ourselves.*”

2. Jesus suffered Thomas to continue in his absurdity and error, without attempting to convince him of them; yea such was his conduct as tended to make Thomas believe that this adoration was cordially accepted. However, Sir, had you been there, I doubt not but you would even have done as your betters, the Jewish rabbies had often done before; reprov'd both the Lord and his servant. Two things apparently rise from these considerations.

1. That Thomas the apostle was not what you call a Rational Dissenter, any more than myself.

2. That the worship of Jesus Christ was very early introduced, and that of course, according to your notion, the true idea of the divine character and government was wholly lost in the days of Christ and his apostles.

I cannot help thinking, by the way, that what time soever the worship of Jesus Christ was introduced, and how erroneous soever it may appear in the eye of a Rational Dissenter, if an error, it is an error divinely instituted. I sincerely beg that you would favour me with an exposition of Heb. i. 6. *When he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith let all the angels of God worship him.* And also John v. 23. “*That all men should*

honour the Son even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.

By the first-begotten in the one text, I apprehend he who is called the Son in the other is intended. If so, it is clear to a demonstration, that he is to be honoured by all the angels of God, and by all the descendants of Adam; and as for the nature of that worship or honour that is to be given to him, we are told that it is such as we ought to pay to the Father. In order to deter us from undervaluing him as a man, by considering him as being such a one as ourselves, and to excite us to honour him even as we honour the Father, we are told that the Father hath committed all judgment unto the Son, and that the Father accepteth of no honour but where the Son is included, "He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father who sent him." Now, Sir, if all the angels of God are commanded to worship the first-begotten, and if all men ought to honour the Son even as they honour the Father, must not the Rational Dissenters be very absurd and impious in considering him as only a man like themselves? If all judgment is committed unto the Son, will there not be some danger, think you of his resenting the conduct of those who undervalue him even as a man, let their pretensions to superior reason to be ever so lofty?

I suppose you will think, Sir, that, there is orthodoxy sufficient in what I have already written in this letter to make the exercise of reading it at one sitting abundantly severe. I shall therefore conclude for this time, subscribing myself,

Reverend Sir,

Your humble Servant.

LETTER V.

INDEED DOCTOR! Is it so, that the Rational Dissenters are apt to undervalue Jesus Christ even as a man? and is this the Rational Christianity that boasts its own excellency above all that is called Orthodox? I verily think, indeed, that having got the only begotten of the Father, brought down to a level with themselves, they might in point of good manners have used him with common decency, and not have undervalued him as you tell us has been their practice. With me this is no proof of their superlative reason I assure you. Do not you think, Sir, in this that they follow the example of Jews and Mahomedans, who also undervalue him as a man, and who also are virtuous and rational in their own way? One would really be tempted to think that the people with whom you are conversant are remarkable for nothing so much, as their dissenting from Jesus Christ as an object of divine adoration. Either you greatly bely them, Doctor, or they must be the most impious and irrational race of beings on this side of the Hellespont.

“ Upon finding, that, instead of being very God of very God, the Creator of heaven and

earth, he is only a man like ourselves, we are apt at first to undervalue him, and not to consider him in that distinguished light, in which though a man he is every where represented *." By which it appears that the first impression your Rational religion makes upon your minds is, to influence you to undervalue the Lord Jesus Christ, instead of worshipping him, even as you worship the Father. Some would be apt to conclude from hence, that Rational religion has very few advantages over scriptural religion which influences us to embrace and adore the Lord Jesus Christ according to the import of his great name **IMMANUEL**. If your Rational Dissenters undervalue the Lord Jesus with impunity, do you think, Doctor, that we shall be damned for rejoicing in him as the seed of David after the flesh, and at the same time adoring him as God over all blessed for evermore? If we should indeed be so unhappy, we shall have cause to execrate the names of those prophets and apostles who have by their doctrines so grievously misled us. But if it should in the end appear that the Redeemer's person is answerable to his adorable name **IMMANUEL**, think seriously, Sir, how they will be likely to fare who undervalue him, even as a man? Will it not be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for such? Although they lift themselves up to heaven

* Prel. Disc. pag. 31.

in pride and self-conceit, will they not be in danger of being cast down into hell, in a way of just condemnation for their having undervalued him, whom the Father delighteth to honour, and whom he hath commanded all men to worship, even as they worship himself? These things deserve a very serious consideration, Doctor: may you and I both consider them aright!

By the way, it is pretty plain, and I am glad to see it, that so illustrious is this truth of Christ's proper and personal deity, that God draweth testimonies to it from the mouths and pens, even of those who are its most avowed enemies. Pagans, ere now have borne testimony to the mission of Jesus; and the hardened Jewish high priest bore witness to the redemption of mankind. I am persuaded it would appear something remarkable if we should find the Rev Dr. Priestley like the Jewish high priest, unknown to himself, testifying the true and proper deity of the Son of God; yet even this is far from being impossible. Give me leave, Sir, to try what may be done in this way: for really I think it not only practicable but easy.

1. After correcting that irreverence of your friends towards the Lord Jesus Christ, which the first impressions of Rational religion are apt to influence them to, you are pleased to set before them a sketch of what you take to be the dignity of his person, amongst which,

I find it declared of Jesus, “ that he has communications with God, and speaks and acts from God in such a manner as no other man ever did *.” You know, Sir, that the patriarchs and prophets, especially the latter, had communications with God so far, as to know and reveal his mind to mankind; what they spake and acted from God, was perfectly right, and acceptable in his sight, insomuch that their doctrine is to this day as authentic as the doctrine of Christ himself. You say that Jesus has communications with God which they never had, which seems to imply a special union between God and him, such as they never enjoyed, nor pretended to. As to the precise definition of this union, he must be precipitate who dares undertake it; but that there is some such undescribable union subsists, your own doctrine apparently supposes. I really believe that we should have had comparatively but few objectors to the proper deity of the blessed Saviour, could our divines have considered the union of God and man in the person of Jesus Christ, as a thing to us incomprehensible, and left it just as it is found in the scriptures, without darkening and left it just as it is found in the scriptures, without darkening and perplexing the subject with their own bewildering and bold attempts to explain it. I am really glad to see that after all your militating against the true and proper

* Prelim. Dis. page 31.

deity of Christ, you cannot help supposing that he enjoys such an union with God as none other can enjoy. According to the stated laws of philosophy, there can be no communication without union; dissolve the union, and communication instantly ceases. The communication which you say Jesus has with God, necessarily supposes an union of Christ's humanity with true and proper deity, such as is enjoyed by no other being whatever.

2. Speaking of Jesus Christ as head over all things to his church, you have these very remarkable words, "*Who will feel for, and will be present with his faithful disciples and followers, even to the end of the world* *." Nothing can be more expressive of my sentiments than this declaration; nothing can less countenance the vain and ignorant notion of the Rational Dissenters "*that Christ is only a man like ourselves*." Yea, nothing can more fully prove the true and proper divinity of the Son of God than this testimony from Dr. Priestley. Indeed, Sir, you must give me leave to be thankful that the most holy God has by your pen confirmed me more and more in that, without which my hope must inevitably be cut off.

Give yourself a little time to reflect, and ask your own heart how it is that one who is only a man like ourselves can feel for his faithful disciples in general, and be with them in all their trials; seeing he is removed, as such

* Preliminary Discourse, page 25.

from them to a distance immense and un-
 speakable? A man like ourselves, must be ca-
 pable, of being only in one place, at one and
 the same period. You and I cannot be, both
 at Leeds and in London at the same time ;
 neither can Jesus, if only like ourselves, be at
 once both on earth and in heaven. That he
 is in heaven, and there must remain as man,
 till his second coming, the apostle Paul bears
 witness ; it will therefore lie upon Dr. Priest-
 ley to shew, how he can be present with his
 people in all their trials, even to the end of
 the world. If Jesus continues in heaven till
 the restitution of all things, as Paul says, and
 and yet be with his people in all their trials,
 as Dr. Priestley, says, and according to his
 own promise, he must be something more than
 a man like ourselves.

You know, Sir, that the faithful disciples
 and followers of Jesus may be exceedingly
 dispersed in the world, and that therefore the
 person who is present with them in all places
 and upon all occasions must needs be very ex-
 traordinary. For instance, they are scattered
 through Britain, and on the continent ; in the
 Indies east and west, in every quarter of the
 globe : therefore, how shall the man Jesus be
 present with them all, in all places, at one
 and the same time, without a presence univer-
 sally diffusive? Indeed, Sir, it will never im-
 peach your wisdom, either as a Christian or a
 Dissenter, to believe, that the being, who

is present with all the heavenly hosts, and at the same time is present with all his people upon earth, in what quarter soever, must be truly and properly God. I cannot tell how you will speak of the omnipresence of God, when you speak thus of the presence of Christ, whom you say is only a man. Really, Sir, I know no body who can answer your writings to better purpose than yourself. I blame both Mr. Venn and the Protestant Dissenter for not giving you the honour so justly merited.

3. It might well be thought an unpardonable neglect, if I was to take no further notice of that wonderful passage, in page 6, of the Preliminary Discourse. “*Having got this hypothesis (namely that Christ was a pre-existent being) they were easily led into a mistaken interpretation of some passages of the Old Testament, and supposed, that when God is there said to have created the world by his word (λογος), another agent was meant, and not the mere power and energy of God himself: though the apostle John seems to have intended expressly to contradict and refute that notion by asserting, in the introduction to his gospel, that what is called λογος or the word, was God himself, and not a being distinct from him.*” How far some texts in the Old Testament have been understood or misunderstood, is not the object of my present enquiry; though it is observable enough, that the inspired apostle

Paul, as well as his brethren, sets forth the existence of Jesus antecedent to his incarnation. All that I aim to take notice of here is, the assertion of John, that “*what is called the word is God himself.*” It is what I by no means deny though I cannot help wondering to see the text cited by one who takes Jesus to be only a man like ourselves. Surely no man was ever more mistaken as to the meaning of a text of scripture, than you are with regard to this, nor less apprehensive of the just consequences of such an injudicious quotation. This text you have cited with a view to prove that Jesus Christ had no existence prior to his coming in the flesh; but, to the entire overthrow of the Rational scheme, it establishes as a rock, the doctrine of the true and proper deity of JESUS JEHOVAH. Admitting that there was no super-angelic spirit employed in the work of creation and providence, but that God himself, by his own proper energy, brought all things into being, and by the same energetic influence supports all things, and that what is called the word is God himself, and not a being distinct from him; what advantage will this be to the Rational scheme, seeing the same who is called the word, and whom you say from John, is God himself, is as expressly said to have been made flesh and to have dwelt amongst us? To set the matter in a clear point of view, it will be proper to recite the passage, chap. i. ver. 1, 2, 3, 14. *In the beginning*

was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. The word was made flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth. I beg leave to present you with a paraphrase on the words, according to your sense of them; and then we shall see how far they will support your account of Jesus Christ, as being only a man like yourself.

In the beginning was God, and God was with God, and God was God himself, the same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him and without him was not any thing made that was made. And God was made flesh, and dwelt among (us and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth. Now, Doctor, this is the fair reading of the words according to your notion; and, had not you told us that you are a Rational Christian, any body would have taken you for one of the worst kind of Athanasians, if not a downright Tritheist. But, it is not my purpose at present to bring further proof upon this head; contenting myself with your own authority for my believing in the proper deity of my blessed Redeemer.

The word was God himself, say you, and so says John the evangelist; who further says,

that *the word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, &c.* That is, God himself was made flesh and dwelt among us. Now, Sir, I should like to know when, or how God himself was made flesh, and dwelt among us, if he was not manifested in the adorable person of Jesus of Nazareth? I think indeed that history furnisheth not with any account of human nature since the fall of Adam, so fit as was his for deity to inhabit. You help me to account for some passages of holy writ which Rational Christians seldom meddle with, such as “*in Jesus dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily,*” which must be the case you know if the word is God himself, and that God himself was made flesh. “*His name shall be called Immanuel, which is, God with us.*” Literally fulfilled when God himself was made flesh, and dwelt among us in our own very nature. This was God manifest in the flesh whom the Apostle Paul speaks of, and which he calls the great mystery of godliness. In this view of the subject, Jesus is justified when in the Apocalypse he assumes the name of Alpha and Omega, which assumption could never be justified on supposition that he had no existence prior to his being born of the virgin.

Indeed, Doctor, those people whom you stile Orthodox are more obliged to you than you were aware of, and henceforward will be

apt to expect advantages to their system from your pen, either designedly or undesignedly.

However, I would not have you or any body else suppose that I have entered here into a defence of Christ's proper divinity; that was by no means my view. All I aimed at was to point out to my reader how far you yourself have defended it, even when you fancied yourself to be writing against it; no judgment therefore is to be formed, by what is here written of my sentiments concerning the person of Jesus, any further than, that I am an hearty advocate for his real divinity: an article of faith, which I should be glad to discuss with the reverend Doctor Priestley, or any of his friends, who may happen to be at leisure.

Upon the whole, Sir, I could almost persuade myself, if it were possible, that it is not the doctrine of Christ's divinity itself that vexes you, so much as the people who maintain it, and perhaps you may have reasons for your prejudice against them, which I am unacquainted with: but really, it does not become a generous mind to retain prejudice against any of our fellow creatures. I intend not any thing upon this subject at present farther than assuring you that I think the rational scheme will require a much better and more consistent defence respecting Christ's

being only a man like ourselves, before it will be likely to gain many profelytes out of the Orthodox tribes.

I am, Reverend Sir,

Your humble Servant.

LETTER VI.

Reverend Sir,

IT is far from my design to misrepresent your meaning, or to make use of unworthy cavils, in order to render you odious to your fellow Christians: neither would I willingly err in the least, in point of fairness, as you think your other antagonists have done; but you must give me leave to say that you have written many things without any meaning at all, unless indeed you intended to vindicate the doctrine of atonement so long exploded by Rational Christians. That the latter was the case, will not easily be believed; and therefore, I shall admit the former, and shall shew from good and authentic records, that it is even possible for a Rational man to write without any meaning. “*When the mind has been tinctured,*” says my author *, *with any false notions of God, it is hardly possible that they should ever be practically rectified; because the same names will continue to suggest the same ideas, and to excite the same feelings, whatever reason may dictate to the contrary.*” I think it is pretty plain that those many, who you say, talk of God like Arminius or

* Preliminary Discourse, page 19.

Socinus, and think of him much like Austin and Calvin, can have no meaning in what they say, seeing their words are a contradiction to the dictates of reason within them. Dr. Priestley also informs us, that formerly he had his mind tinged with those unworthy notions of God, commonly called Orthodoxy; therefore it is impossible that they should ever be practically rectified. This may serve as an apology with the Rational Dissenters for the many Orthodox sayings gleanable in the extensive fields of his productions, of which it may be said that they spring up in as little time as mushrooms; whether those of them that are upon divine subjects are likely to be of longer duration, I cannot certainly determine. However, the dictates of the doctor's reason being diametrically opposite to every sentiment of Orthodoxy; it follows, reader, that wherever you meet with an Orthodox sentence in Dr. Priestley's works, you need not be offended with it, for it is only the influence which the former tincture of his mind has upon him, and in reality the author meant nothing by it.

It is indeed my opinion that many of your sayings, respecting the sufferings of Christ, are very orthodox, and some of them even strictly Calvinistic. Surely it will be the wonder of the age if you should at last come over to the Calvinists. Really, Doctor, I do not despair of your conversion; for I think it not im-

possible, notwithstanding all that the Rev. Mr. Venn and the Protestant Dissenter have pleaded to the contrary. Should I prove you a Calvinist, and expose you to the persecutions of your Rational brethren, what would you say, Sir? Would not you allow me to have some pretensions to reason myself, although numbered even amongst the Orthodox?

But, before I proceed farther upon this head, give me leave to observe, that I am as great an enemy as you can be, to the burning of bodies for heresy; that is, putting people to death for the glory of God, and the good of the church; and have the murder of Servetus in equal abhorrence with yourself, notwithstanding Calvin was therein an accomplice. Nevertheless, when I consider that all the enemies of Calvin's doctrine, who have written from Bellarmine down to Dr. Priestley, have carefully recorded this instance, and industriously held him up to public infamy for it, it convinces me that Mr. Calvin must have been a man of the most irreproachable conduct and spirit in every other part of his life, seeing his avowed enemies have been able to find nothing else against him but that infamous act, of his consenting to the death of mistaken Servetus, so that the very reproaches of his enemies serve only to embellish his character and to advance his reputation. I am not certain whether Dr. Priestley, would give his consent to the burning of Orthodox Dissenters

at a stake for their bigotry; but if we may give credit to his own testimony, he is very willing that they should burn in hell fire for their orthodoxy; for he is fully persuaded, that Jesus Christ will do by them, just as he did by the pharisees in his time; the children of the kingdom, who were cast out into utter darkness, where is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. After such an expression of your charity, really, Sir, your censure of John Calvin hath not the most favourable appearance. Most people will be apt to conclude, that your spirit possesseth a degree of rancour, at least not inferior to that spirit which persecuted Michael Servetus; but it is well for the Orthodox Dissenters that there is a great difference between Calvin's influence and that of the Rev. Doctor Priestley. I might indeed ask you if those who are now called Orthodox are the only people who have had the honour of burning heretics, and whether the Arians themselves, in the days of their Orthodoxy, did not see the same necessity of glorifying God by destroying those who differed from them. Indeed, Sir, there are few sects among us who have not a lawful claim to the honour of having murdered their brethren for the good of the cause: and I am very much mistaken, if even in our own days, we could not be furnished with divines who would very willingly take this method of reclaiming the refractory, were they but blessed

with a government favourable for such a purpose.

But, leaving the shocking scenes of pious murder, I shall give due attention to your doctrine of atonement, as I find it scattered in your prolific pages: and I rejoice to see it forcing its evidence through the labours of the most strenuous opposition, and making even Dr. Priestley himself act in subservience to the great designs of truth. The first passage I shall quote relates to the mission of Jesus, shews to what end he was sent into the world, and is found page 20, of your Considerations of Differences of Opinion. “*A sense of our obligation to our Lord Jesus Christ, also as a person commissioned from God to redeem, that is, to deliver, save, or rescue us from a state of sin and misery.*” Now, Sir, whatever meaning you had, or whether you really have any meaning at all in these words, you must not be offended if I take the sentence according to its grammatical construction, and apply it to the purpose in view. The phraseology is truly Calvinistic, and Calvin himself could not better have expressed his own meaning than you do, even when you are labouring to root out Calvinism from the face of the earth. I am afraid, Doctor, that the Rational Dissenters will compare you to David Simple’s brown-cow, which having given a good pailful of milk, kicked it down with her foot. It is true you have laboured to soften that inflexible

word (*redeem*); but in fact it will appear that your explanation has but very little promoted the interests of rational religion. Has really befriended what you call Orthodoxy, and not overturned it as you humbly expected.

“*To redeem us from a state of sin and misery,*” is the text, “*To deliver, save, or rescue us from a state of sin and misery,*” is your commentary upon it. Give me leave to comment on your commentary, before I meddle with the text. And I assure you, I do not illustrate it by my own authority only, but bring along with me the authority of Samuel Johnson, A. M. in his almost unliftable Dictionary, whose testimony as a Dictionary-maker, is generally held to be good and authentic. He tells me that to deliver, is to save or rescue, so that we have here no less than three words given in order to make clear the sense of one. Would not these three words, heaped thus together, seem to convey the idea of some great and imminent danger to which the parties, thus to be delivered, saved or rescued, stood exposed? Also, does not the idea of something very great and hazardous in the undertaking of him who was thus commissioned to deliver, save, or rescue, suggest itself from them. In order to deliver, save or rescue us from a state of sin and misery, must not what he did who was thus commissioned, be in some way or other accounted to us, and rendered available

by some kind of application. But ought we not in explaining a word or sentence to come up as near as possibly we can to its real sense, if we are not able fully to express it? This you avoided in the present case; notwithstanding your gloss upon the word (redeem) expresses much more than is favourable to the rational scheme. Permit me to review the word redeem in its common acceptation, and consider the Saviour's commission accordingly; that I may thereby teach you either to become Orthodox yourself, or leave our phrases to our own proper use.

1. To redeem. To ransom; to relieve by paying a price.

2. To redeem. To make atonement.

3. To redeem. To save the world from the curse due to sin.

4. To redeem. To rescue, to recover.

You tell us that Jesus was commissioned by God to redeem us; we see that to redeem, was to ransom us, by paying the price of our redemption. What that price was, by which he ransomed us, you are pleased to shew in these precious words: "*Who loved us and freely gave himself to death for us**." So that if we admit Dr. Priestley to be his own expositor, the doctrine will be thus defined. Jesus Christ is a person commissioned of God to ransom us, by giving himself to death as the price of our redemption. This is found

* Preliminary Discourse, page 24.

divinity, Sir; good Orthodox Calvinism. If some certain gentlemen, now dwelling in the house appointed for all living, were to lift up their heads from under the turf and review your writings, they would undoubtedly blame you for betraying the cause of Rational religion, by inadvertently blending your writings with so many Orthodox phrases, provided they have not departed from their former sentiments. But to the matter in hand; you tell us that Jesus Christ is a person commissioned by God to redeem us. To redeem us is to make an atonement for us. Paul the Apostle tells us, that this was made by the sacrifice of himself, whereby he for ever perfected all who are sanctified, which is confirmed by your assertion that he loved us and gave himself to death for us. Giving himself to death for us was certainly what the apostle meant by the sacrifice of himself. Sacrifices were ordained to make an atonement for sin; the Redeemer therefore gave himself as a sacrifice for us, that he might atone for the sin which we had committed, as you very justly observe, by putting the following words into Christ's mouth, alluding to the legal sacrifices, page 2, of your Additional Remarks, &c. "*My blood may be said to be shed for the remission of sins,*" which must be, because it is atoning blood, and hath procured this remission or pardon. Good Calvinism again, Sir. You tell us that Christ was commissioned of God to redeem

us, “ we find that this redemption is said to be, to deliver the world from the curse due to sin ;” and if we want to know how this was done, the apostle tells us that *he delivered us from the curse of the law by being made a curse for us*. Here was the innocent becoming a curse for the guilty ; a doctrine which your reason strongly remonstrates against, but which your pen very agreeably establishes, Doctor. It was certainly very unhappy for Rational religion that your mind was so strongly tinctured with Orthodoxy in your younger days ; for as you justly observe, it is impossible that ever it should be practically rectified. Mortal man could hardly do more to rectify it than you have done ; and yet, in spite of yourself, Orthodoxy will break out in your compositions.

To redeem, is to rescue or recover, as you say, which is very expressive of the work of the Redeemer upon the redeemed ; by his bringing us out of darkness into marvellous light, and from the power of Satan to the living God. Well may we then, as you advise us, “ *entertain in our minds a very high idea of the benefits accruing to us by his life and death* * ;” good experimental divinity indeed ! divinity worthy your most serious consideration. This is the very thing that the Independents require in order to communion with them ; and which you say there is not a shadow of ground for in the New Testament.

* Considerations on the Lord’s Supper, page 57.

Whether there is the shadow of ground for it in the New Testament * or not, I have shewn that there is the substance of ground for it in Dr. Priestley's own writings.

Give me leave to correct a small inaccuracy in that otherwise beautiful passage of yours, “ *who loved us and freely gave himself to death for us, to redeem us from sin and misery ; that we might become partakers of the same love of God with him ; and be joint heirs of the same glory and happiness † ;* notwithstanding you consider the Son of God to be only a man like yourself ; yet, even as a man like yourself, you ought to have treated him with common civility, and not have given him the lie as in the passage under consideration. Christ himself tells us, “ *that GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life ‡.*” Here the love of God is represented as sovereign, and spontaneous, the sole cause of the gift of Christ. This you deny, and alledge that the gift of Christ is the cause why we are beloved of God. “ *He gave himself, that we might become partakers of the love of God,*” say you ; supposing, that the world of mankind were not partakers of the love of God, till Christ had given himself to redeem us and procure this love for us.

* Address on Church Discipline, page 34.

† Preliminary Discourse, page 24.

‡ John iii. 16.

Do not Doctor be offended at those who talk of purchased pardon, seeing, according to the obvious sense of your own words, the very love itself which pardons the sinner, is purchased or procured by the death of Jesus. But the truth is, the love which God bore to mankind was the cause of Christ's being at all given; the end to which Christ was given, was, that as many as believe in him should be brought to possess the blessings of this loving kindness.

In your first query to the Protestant Dissenter, you twice mention, in the very language of Calvinism, "*what Christ has done and suffered for us.*" How could what he did; be done for us if it was not done in our stead? Or how could he with any propriety be said to have suffered for us, if the pain which he endured was not the proper punishment of our sin and rebellion? He could neither do nor suffer for us, without standing in our place; if he did so, then he was the sinner's substitute to all intents and purposes. How can you then, Sir, consistent with yourself, blame those who believe that the innocent Jesus died for guilty man? This Calvinistical Doctrine of vicarious punishment you thus set forth in page 30 of Additional Consideration, &c. "*When we do any thing in remembrance of Christ, we do it to take occasion to recollect what Christ has done and suffered for us in order to accomplish the gracious scheme of our*

salvation, or our deliverance from sin and misery. Our Lord also calls the bread his body, and the wine his blood apparently with a view to our recollecting in a more especial manner the last and most perfect instance of his love, in giving his body to be crucified, and his blood to be shed for us." Again in page 32, "*this cup is the New Testament in my blood, appears to me to have been added, in order to express on what account we are to remember him, viz. as having by his death accomplished the scheme of our salvation.*" Very pretty divinity indeed! passable enough, even with the Orthodox; all tending to set forth the plenary satisfaction made by Christ for the sins of those who shall believe in him.

I am, Reverend Sir,

Your humble Servant.

LETTER VII.

Reverend Sir,

AS you have been pleased to signify the high and good opinion which you have conceived of your own attainments in your letter to Mr. Venn, pag. 79. where you tell us that “*Having experienced an almost entire revolution in your own religious sentiments, you find your heart better, and your head clearer in consequence of it, &c.*” I should have expected that the doctrine of election and reprobation would have had no countenance in your performances. It is but just to believe that you would not willingly promote a doctrine, which your clear reason so strongly remonstrates against, any more than the Rev. Mr. John Wesley, A. M. sometime fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford; who in the depth of his humility and self-diffidence is pleased to stile that same doctrine “**THE HORRIBLE DECREE.**” It would seem that this reverend gentleman in the younger part of life had made an excursion down to hell, like the heroes of ancient fable, where he had an opportunity of hearing the cries of the damned and of being informed by them of the horrible-ness of this decree; which account he thought

proper to communicate to the world as soon as he got safe upon earth again. This performance was an unfacred hymn upon the horrible decree. Yet after all the clearness of his head, he has been unable to restrain himself in his future publications from giving many bold strokes in favour of this same decree of election; for the Rev. Mr. Wesley has not yet learned to be *perfectly* consistent with himself, any more than Dr. Priestley and myself. Were I to study to put you out of conceit with the goodness of your heart, Sir, I should very likely have little thanks for my trouble; but if Solomon were here, he would tell you that the man who trusts in his own heart is a fool. And really, Doctor, you have not given the Orthodox Dissenters any proof of its superlative goodness. Give me leave to tell you that, I am of opinion there is a great deal of room for your heart to grow better and your head to grow clearer still, on supposition that any thing can be gathered of the state of either, by your lucubrations. Between you and I, it is not thought very advisable to put too much trust in the heart of man, or to lean much to human understanding. Some people will not scruple to alledge that *the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, even beyond the knowledge of its owner.* This they will assign as a reason why some flatter themselves that *they are rich and increased with goods and have need*

of nothing, even when they are wretched, miserable, blind and naked. Indeed, Sir, as you say of the Orthodox Dissenters, I may say to you; it would have been more eligible, and abundantly more for your honour, to have left it to me to publish the goodness of your heart, and the clearness of your head, than to have taken that trouble upon yourself, which must needs have been very mortifying to such modesty as yours. However it is pretty plain, that the fruits of your conversion to the Rational scheme, have not been so conspicuous, to others, as to yourself; as nothing but their want of discernment could have put you under the disagreeable necessity of founding your own praise, in imitation of the pharisees and their descendants.

I hope, Sir, that your goodness will pardon the unhappy way that I have got of departing on a sudden from the subject proposed, and bear with my freedom while I enquire after the meaning of that passage, page 4. of your Essay on Church Discipline, "*The general promulgation of the gospel of Christ, was intended to procure him, from all nations promiscuously, a peculiar people zealous of good works.*" I take it to be the very language of the Orthodox, and what the strictest Calvinist will by no means object to. When you assert that the promulgation of the gospel was intended to answer this important purpose; I would suppose you mean that it was intended

by God himself. Might not I ask you if you do not think an intention in the infinite mind, in all respects equivalent to a decree? seeing he is of one mind and none can turn him, nor render abortive his grand designs. It will then appear that God had decreed that Christ should have a peculiar people zealous of good works, to be gathered by the preaching of the gospel out from all nations promiscuously. This you can have no objection to, and for my part I have none, therefore so far we are agreed. This decree or intention of the most High being admitted, it follows that the people to be procured are said to be a peculiar people; as such it behoves us to enquire into their character. On enquiry we shall find that this peculiar people, are such whom the Redeemer appropriates to himself as his own special property, upon whom no other power whatever has any just or lawful claim, and with whom he deals as he does not with the world, or the nations from whom you say they are procured by the gospel. These I take to be the people whom the apostle calls the fulness and body of Christ. So then it is apparent from your doctrine that the most High intended that Christ should have a people appropriated to himself, and this people to be procured to him *from* the nations of the whole world. This procuring of a people for himself *from* all nations promiscuously, naturally supposeth that the nations themselves from

which they are procured are not intended to be Christ's peculiar people, therefore not procured by the promulgation of the gospel. Very good Calvinism! Good old Orthodox-doctrine neighbour!

I am not rightly satisfied Doctor with your free manner of talking about what you call experience, while you blame others for the very same thing. You tell us that you have experienced an almost entire revolution of your religious sentiments. Pray, Sir, why may not they have experienced the same? Have not they an equal right with yourself to embrace the truth upon conviction? You say that you have experienced your head to be got clearer and your heart better upon this experimental revolution of your religious sentiments; and as the Orthodox, especially the Independents, have embraced a set of sentiments diametrically opposite to yours, why should you be affronted at them because they experience the very reverse of your feelings, and instead of their heads becoming clearer and their hearts better by the revolution in their religious sentiment, they become daily more acquainted with the deceitfulness of their hearts and the insufficiency of their heads. You know, Sir, that our leading principle is, that every set of religious sentiments must produce effects upon the mind suitable to itself. You cannot therefore expect, Doctor, that your set of religious sentiments and mine

can produce the very same effects upon the mind, seeing they are as opposite as light and darkness. But let my set of religious sentiments produce what effects it may, my experience of these sentiments and their effects must be as real as your own ; and I may be as sensible of the badness and sinfulness of my heart, as you are of the virtue and goodness of yours. Besides, you take the liberty to publish your experience to the whole world, if they will take the trouble of reading it ; and why may not a member of an Independent church publish his experience to the community he intends to associate with ? Indeed, Doctor, it is neither very generous nor rational to deny your neighbours the same liberty which you are pleased to take to yourself.

Moreover, you tell us that “ *the Independents require also such an account of what they call experiences in religion as there is not a shadow of ground for in the New Testament, and which few but enthusiasts will pretend to.* ” You are by far too dogmatical, Doctor, you must strive to break yourself of that impolite positive way of speaking you have got ; unless you intend to make the world believe that you are not as yet perfectly purged from self-conceit. Who these enthusiasts are, and what their pretensions be, I am not a competent judge : but according to my way of thinking, no man can have a juster title to that distinction, than the gentleman who, having undergone an en-

ture revolution in his religious sentiments, finds his heart better and his head clearer upon the change, which you tell us has been your blessed experience.

In your Additional Observations on the Lord's Supper, pag. 36. you appeal "to the EXPERIENCE of the most sincere Christian, if he has not found every devotional feeling as lively in the exercise of prayer, as in the act, or in consequence of receiving the Lord's Supper." I really believe they have, Doctor; every whit as lively. But what amazes me is, to find a writer who exclaims against those who talk of experience in religion as enthusiasts, should himself talk of "experience and devotional feelings," as if the Rational Dissenters had obtained the exclusive right of all devotional feelings to themselves. What some people call experience, and others call enthusiasm, can hardly be better expressed than by your phrase, "devotional feelings." To represent this important subject in a stronger light, let us suppose for instance that the Rev. Dr. Priestley approaches God in prayer, under a lively sense of the vast revolution he has undergone in his religious sentiments, and of the goodness of his heart and clearness of his head consequent upon it; would not every devotional feeling exert itself in thankfulness to God, that he is not absurd like the Orthodox Dissenters, bigotted and angry like the Rev. Mr. Venn; unjust and unfair like the Protestant

Dissenter, and ignorant and weak like myself. This, you know, Sir, must be felt and experienced by you in a Rational way, and why may not the people, whom you call Orthodox, *i. e.* irrational have devotional feelings and experience in their own way, though different from yours? I cannot help thinking that the poor publican in the parable had, as real and lively an experience of his own wretchedness and sin, as the gentleman pharisee had of his devotional feelings, and of the goodness of his heart and clearness of his head. Each was experimental, in his own way; and the one had as good a right to lament his own sinfulness, as the other had to proclaim his personal goodness.

This brings to my mind a saying of yours, Additional Observations on the Lord's Supper, pag. 28. "*If the righteous disclaim their good works at the day of Judgment, can it be supposed that they will plead and proclaim them here?*" Really, Sir, I should think not; and that makes me the more surpris'd to hear from you any thing at all about the goodness of heart and the clearness of head which you have experienced. To make use of your own words, "*It would be rather more decent for others to have persuaded you to think so well of yourself, than that you should first pay yourself that compliment.*"

I will inform you, Doctor, what kind of experiences the Independents require in order to

admission into their communion, and then we shall see whether there be any shadow of ground for it or not in the New Testament. They require that the candidate for communion should experimentally know himself to be a lost, undone, and perishing sinner; one who stands in need of an all-sufficient and every way complete Saviour, to redeem him from the wrath to come and to save him to the uttermost. That he should have such a sense of his own helplessness as to know that he can do nothing, unless God is pleased to work in him both to will and to do. That he believe in Jesus as the only, the all-sufficient Saviour of lost sinners and desire to be found in him, washed in his blood and clothed with his righteousness and salvation. Such and only such is the experience which Independent churches require, and which Dr. Priestley says has not a shadow of ground in the New Testament. You must have forgotten yourself strangely here, Sir, on supposition that you have ever read the 2d of the Acts of the Apostles. The apostle preached the sufferings and death of Christ to the multitude; under his sermon the three thousand were pricked in their hearts with a sense of their sin and danger, as is apparent from their pathetic exclamation, *Men and brethren what must we do?* Peter preached the Saviour of sinners to be believed in as the only way of life and salvation; they received the world gladly. It would seem that

on believing in Jesus their sorrow was turned into joy ; and all this was antecedent to their being admitted into the Christian church. This is rather more than a bare shadow of a ground for the experiences which you say the Independents require. Your words pag. 118. on Discipline, are very applicable to those primitive Christians who were “ *taught wisdom and virtue by these their feelings and experience,*” for they continued stedfast in the apostles doctrine without any revolution in their religious sentiments ; in their fellowship and in breaking of bread and in prayer, without losing all manner of church order and discipline, as the Rational Dissenters have done, according to your testimony. That same church at Jerusalem, I remember would not receive the apostle Paul into their communion till they had an account of his experience, how far, and by what means he had learned Christ. Paul was no way backward to relate his experience on different occasions, and yet I do not recollect that, at any time by so doing he proclaimed his own goodness, however much the goodness of God was made manifest in him. Of all the people that ever heard this apostle preach, little was said by him about the goodness of his heart, or the clearness of his head ; but he could talk very feelingly of the law in his members, which warred against the law in his mind ; the flesh that lusted against the spirit ; the body of death which was still upon

him even after his conversion. I would advise you, Doctor, to make a close comparison between your experience and that of the apostle Paul, for his was certainly of the right kind, whatever yours or mine may be; and it is a matter of no small importance whether we are right or wrong in this case, seeing death will cast the dye and unalterably fix our state forever in weal or woe unspeakable. I might refer you to Lydia whose heart the Lord opened, to Jairus, the jailor, and many others, whose experience was much a-kin to what the Independents require of those whom they chuse to admit into their communion; but I think what has been said sufficient for the present, especially if you will consider it dispassionately and without prejudice.

One thing more I must take notice of before I conclude, and that is a very odd phrase of yours in pag. 36. of your Ess. on Disc. “*It has pleased the Divine Being for good and obvious reasons not to make the terms of salvation so very determinate, as that a man shall be able to pronounce with absolute certainty concerning the future state of himself or others while we are in this life.*” The obvious intent of this is to insinuate, that the Independents take upon them to determine with absolute certainty on the eternal state of those whom they admit into communion. Which just before you represent as a judging of the heart,

and of a person's actual fitness for heaven. This misrepresentation of the conduct of the Independents must unavoidably bear somewhat hard against, either the goodness of your heart, or the clearness of your head; goodness of heart will not permit us wrongfully to accuse, but from certain causes we may have mistaken views of the conduct of our neighbours. However our publication of those mistaken views will never be deemed by the public an incontestible proof of the deepest penetration and intelligence. A little to purge them from this scandal, give me leave to observe that you tell us, the Independents require an account of the experience of the candidate. This account which the candidate gives is the subject of their examination, and upon it they determine whether or not it be consistent with the scripture; but as to the sincerity of the person, and the reality of his experience, they pretend to be no further judges of, than "what appears in the outward propriety and regularity of his behaviour." Will you upon cool reflection call this a taking upon them to determine with absolute certainty on the future state of the candidate? Seeing they do not even take upon them to determine on his present state, but on the profession which he makes, and of his conduct consequent upon it.

This passage also injuriously insinuates, that

the Independents expect that candidates for communion should be able to determine upon their own future state, by being delivered from all doubts of their sincerity and fears of final miscarriage; which Dr. Priestley himself must needs know to be groundless, if he is in the least acquainted with Independent church discipline. And one would suppose that he is perfectly informed in its nature, when he can so positively declare that it is better to be without discipline altogether, than to embrace the discipline of the Independents, pag. 40.

The TERMS of salvation are not so determinate you say, &c. What! Doctor, is salvation to be sold, that we must talk of *terms*? I should have taken the terms to be sufficiently determinate, when the comprehensive blessing is expressly said to be without money and without price: yet if we must talk of buying and selling of salvation, let us keep to bible language. But supposing that we must come up to terms in order to obtain salvation, are not those terms as yet determined? Not so determinate as to be the ground of a sure and certain hope of a blessed immortality for those who believe in Jesus in a scripture sense? So then Rational religion supposeth, that, the terms of salvation are as yet undetermined; and irrational or scriptural religion supposeth that he that be- on the Son hath life, and he that believeth

not on the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him. Of these two commend me to the latter.

I am,

Reverend Sir,

Your humble Servant.

LETTER VIII.

Reverend Sir,

I AM entirely of your opinion that “*knowingly to conceal the truth, is a crime of so heinous a nature, that I should be very unwilling to impute it to any person whatever**,” and am ready to believe that you must have been witness to a great deal of dissimulation, to the great grief of your own open and ingenious spirit, before your candour would have suffered you to impute such a grievous crime to the Rational Dissenting ministers, who you tell us, *Essay on Discipline, pag. 55.* “*entertaining sentiments in religion different from those of their people, and such as their people would not have borne with, they endeavoured to keep them (i. e. their sentiments) as much as possible out of view.*” This is doubtless a crime of so heinous a nature, that your thus publicly charging them with it, naturally supposeth your provocation has been great. Moreover your familiar acquaintance with them is attended with peculiar advantages, such as no Orthodox writer can pretend to; being thereby led to the very spring of this their dissimulation,

* *Differences of Opinion, pag. 9.*

which we now find to be “ a fear of losing their subscribers * . “ *In this situation of the generality of dissenting ministers they will necessarily feel themselves restrained from doing their duty by the fear of giving offence, and of losing the affections and contributions of their more considerable hearers. Are not your ministers, men, and men of like passions and interests with yourselves ?*” A very candid and honest confession indeed : Of the greatest use in leading us into the scope and ultimate aim of the Rational Dissenting ministers, with whom it is apparent that the contribution of a considerable hearer, is of more weight than the most Rational sentiment, seeing rather than lose the one they will disguise the other. Do not you think, Sir, that people of less penetration than yourself may in some measure be justified in preferring an honest enthusiast, who preaches to the extent of his knowledge and belief, to a Rational Dissenter, who for fear of losing the contributions of his hearers, keeps his own sentiments as much as possible out of view ? I really wonder that a gentleman of your known integrity and philosophic turn of mind should be persuaded to associate with such an herd of dissemblers ; whom you and I have convicted of the most heinous crime of concealing the truth from their hearers for fear of losing their subscriptions.

This leads us to account for that contempt

* Essay on Discipline, pag. 47.

in which they are held by the people, who as you tell us, pag. 41. Eff. on Disc. have “ *in some societies expressly forbidden the ministers their houses except they come by special invitation.* *” If this be your own particular case, indeed I pity you, Doctor; and I think your people are very much obliged to your ingenuity, in so gently covering their shame even when you rebuke their folly. This prohibition laid upon the Rational ministers by their hearers, would naturally lead us to suppose that the conversation of the ministers was too grave and serious for the taste of their people, if you had not all along discovered such disgust at grave and serious religion; for which they can by no means be blamed. We have therefore but one way left to account for it, and that is, by supposing that the people received but very little profit by the company of their ministers; otherwise they never would have forbidden them their houses. This seems very likely to be the case, as certainly a man who can conceal the truth in the pulpit, will make but little scruple of doing it in private. We have quite the advantage of you here, for it would be thought a very strange thing among the Orthodox, if a minister was denied the liberty of eating a bit of pudding with any of his hearers whenever he was in the humour so to do. Yea more, Doctor, one of

* The passage is thus. “ I am informed there are societies among us in which the ministers are expressly forbidden to visit their hearers except by particular invitation.”

the principal complaints that you shall hear from the Orthodox against their ministers, is, that *they do not visit their people often enough*; which at least shews that they are not tired of their company.

It would require uncommon talents indeed for a minister, how cautious soever he may be, so absolutely to keep his real sentiments out of view, but that they will peep from behind the curtain sometimes; the devil himself, as some people say, is not such an absolute master of dissimulation, but he is found out occasionally. Well, this dissimulation being detected, and the cause of it easily guessed at, it is no wonder that the Rational ministers are held in such contempt. “*that a word of admonition from them in the pulpit would give unpardonable offence* *.” Seeing while the minister is telling them of their sins, they would be thinking of his dissembling his sentiments; and as it is natural for us to favour ourselves most, they would be apt to conclude that his hypocrisy is altogether as heinous as their drunkenness and whoredom. To be sure, Sir, a minister can never admonish with a becoming authority either in the pulpit or out of it, whilst it is in the power of the admonished party to retort upon him, *physician heal thyself*; therefore the strictest integrity is necessary to that minister who would admonish profitably, let him be Orthodox or

* *Ess. on Disc.* page. 41.

Rational. You tell us that, in many places the congregations of the most Rational ministers are dwindled away to nothing, notwithstanding the excellency of their compositions; and if you would know the reason of that, Sir, you may consider that one grain of honest zeal is of more esteem with the generality of hearers, than the greatest ingenuity that can discover itself in sermonical compositions. All are not judges of that Rational ingenuity which you so much applaud, but most people are intelligent enough to discern when the minister really aims at their everlasting welfare and does what he can for its advancement. It is observable enough that, this dwindling away has always been most discernable, in those congregations where the minister has been most remarkable for *keeping his sentiments out of view, and cautious of admonishing for fear of losing the affections and contributions of his most considerable hearers*. On the other hand it is equally observable that among the Orthodox those ministers are most loved and followed who are most faithful in reproving and admonishing sinners both when in the pulpit and out of it, without any regard had to what may, or may not be the consequences of such admonition. And those places of worship are best filled where the minister warmly and zealously declareth the whole counsel of God so far as he himself has learned it. How can those congregations

prosper where they are entertained with a disguised and deceitful ministry? For my own part I would rather choose to sit under such a ministry as that of tinker Bunyan or cobbler Howe, where I should be sure to be sincerely dealt with, than that of a learned, ingenious, Rational Dissenting Minister, who strives as much as possible to keep his sentiments out of view. It must indeed be very mortifying to gentlemen who have engrossed the whole of Rationality to themselves to see the Orthodox ministers loved esteemed, and followed whilst they with all their pretensions, “*are considered as persons who are paid by their hearers for haranguing them once a week* *.” Contemptible, however, as this estimation of their ministers is, it is certainly very just; and what they have brought upon themselves by their silent connivances at sin, and their concealment of truth from their hearers for fear of losing their subscriptions.

* In short a Dissenting minister among those who are usually called the Rational Dissenters begins now to be considered as a person who is paid by his hearers for haranguing them once a week; and the people attend the place of divine worship if not from mere unthinking habit, with the same views with which they would attend the lectures of any other person from whom they expected instruction or entertainment. *Ess. on Disc. pag. 41.*

If I understand this passage aright, the Doctor means that the people attend the weekly harangues of Rational ministers with the same views with those who attend the lectures on philosophy by Mr. Ferguson and other gentlemen for instruction; and the giddy multitude who gape at the entertaining lectures on heads by George Alexander Stevens.

Young Samuel's message from God to Eli the priest, concludes with a passage very applicable to the present case of the Rational Dissenting ministers, and which may be very instructive if attended to with seriousness, "*for them that honour me I will honour; and them that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.*" That the Rational Dissenting ministers are lightly esteemed you and I have sufficiently shewn; it is therefore not unworthy of themselves to enquire into the reasons why they are so lightly esteemed even by their own people? To assist in this enquiry, be it observed, that here is an express promise, that all who aim at the honour and glory of God shall be honoured by him, among his people; but they (the Rational Dissenting ministers) are despised among their people and are even forbidden their houses, instead of being beloved, honoured and obeyed; which supposeth that they have been too much like the sons of Eli, who sought their own gratification and not the glory of God; for God who has promised is faithful and will not deny himself. Do not you think now, that if, instead of concealing their sentiments, and shamefully conniving at the sins of their people without daring to admonish them, the Rational Dissenting ministers had studied to maintain consciences void of offence towards God and man, by being faithful in reproofing sin wherever it was found, and honestly declaring the whole counsel of

God as far as they knew it, that they would in all probability have been more respectable in the eyes of the very people, who, as things are, have forbidden them their houses? But having dishonoured God he hath brought them into that contempt which you complain of. God hath said, “ *he that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully; for what is the chaff to the wheat saith the Lord?*” Jer. xxiii. 28. But instead of obeying, having got the word of the Lord, as they think, more perfectly than their neighbours, they conceal it in their hearts, and keep it as much as possible out of view for fear of losing their most considerable subscribers. This is a dishonouring of God by preferring their own temporal emolument to the success of that which they take to be the truth, and shews them to be lovers of the world more than of the word of God. The word of God chargeth expressly that we shall not suffer sin to rest upon a brother, but that we shall in any wise reprove him for it; but they admonish not, because as you say, “ *the least hint of an admonition from the pulpit would give unpardonable offence.*” How is it possible, Doctor, that such men should be otherwise than lightly esteemed? I assure you, Sir, if this account of the Rational ministers had not come from one who cannot be suspected of doing them injustice, I could not have believed that such a contemptible race of mere scholars existed among us. If a mini-

ster is faithful to the light he hath received, God will make him as a brazen wall and as an iron pillar among the people, who if they fight against him shall not prevail; but if he is afraid of losing their contributions, the same God will confound him before them, and bring him into contempt. I really wish that you, Sir, and your brethren, might seriously and attentively consider these things without prejudice: for if it should in the end appear that you are now fighting against God, a retrospective view of your present conduct will then yield neither profit nor pleasure. I hope you will bear with me, if I express it as my opinion that you have not weighed the great and important truths of Christianity with that impartiality, and attention which the nature of the subject required; but upon detecting some things which you took to be absurd among the people called Orthodox, you have too precipitately fled absolutely to the utmost limits of the opposite extreme. But remember this, Sir, that the middle path of judgment will be always found to lie between the two extremes; therefore to avoid what we take to be an error on one hand, we ought to be very careful lest we plunge into a greater on the other, and so the remedy prove worse than the disease.

Being informed, “*that with the generality of those who are now called Presbyterians in England, the whole government of the society,*

with respect to morals, is in the hands of the minister *," that the Rational Presbyterian ministers "found it necessary to dissemble their sentiments by keeping them as much as possible out of view because their people would not have borne with them †," that they "find themselves restrained from doing their duty for fear of losing the affections and contributions of their most considerable hearers ‡," so that they dare, not give a word of admonition from the pulpit §." It is not at all marvellous that "the very idea of ancient church discipline should be lost among you, and your system be found so very imperfect ||," that if it were possible for a primitive Christian to see the order of your churches, he would hardly think there was the appearance of your professing yourselves Christians ¶," especially "as those who do not believe in Christianity do almost every thing that ye do *." After such an humbling view of the effects of Rational religion in the entire loss of church discipline among your friends, one would hardly have expected to hear you declare that "in your opinion it is better to have no church discipline at all, than that of the Independents †." Yet even here it is much if you are perfectly agreed with yourself seeing you give it, elsewhere, as your opinion that "it is better to have the

* Pag. 40.

† Pag. 55.

‡ Pag. 47.

§ Pag. 42.

|| Pag. 45.

¶ Pag. 41.

* Pag. 43.

† Pag. 39.

power of discipline in the hands of the minister or any other body than to have no discipline at all." To this I should however object unless it should appear that the minister is a man of integrity, who dares openly avow the truth, and who will rather choose to loose the affections and contributions even of his richest hearers than keep out of view any truth the knowledge of which may be useful to the souls of men.

To do evil with a design to promote the cause of truth, and to pull down the church of God with a view to build up the gospel in its simplicity, is a conduct so absurd that from your account of the Orthodox it could only be expected to be found in their tabernacles. But to hear the Rev. Dr. Priestley represent it as the conduct of Rational Dissenting ministers, is indeed astonishing! I think, Sir, that these same gentlemen must be Antinomians, seeing their conduct, according to your account of it says, "*let us do evil, and good shall follow,*" pag. 55. *Finding themselves more particularly incommoded and embarrassed with the extra duties of their office, they laid hold of every opportunity of abolishing them.*" Of all men, surely none so unfit to stir up others to the practice of Christianity as those gentlemen who laid hold on every opportunity of abolishing the duties of their own office, finding themselves incommoded and embarrassed by them: it is therefore natural to suppose

that admonition from them must give unpardonable offence to every intelligent hearer, who had opportunity of seeing their own endeavours to abolish the extra duties of the pastoral office. The abolition of the duties of their own office was not thought sufficient for the promulgation of Rational religion, but every other office power within the Rational churches must be abolished also, for we are told that as the ministers found “ *the bulk of the people, and especially the church officers, who were generally the more serious and zealous of their members, continuing strongly attached to the opinions in which they had been educated, (i. e. Orthodox opinions) the ministers found themselves greatly incommoded by them.—In this disagreeable situation the ministers purposely neglected to fill up vacancies in church offices, and were in general heartily glad when they became entirely extinct *.*” If this was not practical Antinomianism, certainly there is no such thing in existence. However, it does not seem to reflect the highest honour on these gentlemen, that they were opposed by the more serious and zealous of their congregation; nor dishonour upon the Orthodox that the more serious and zealous should be of that persuasion. If your authority is to be depended upon, Sir, as I think it may, it is very apparent that Rational religion obtained only, the younger and more irreligious part

of the people for her votaries, whilst the aged, the more zealous and serious continued strongly attached to the Orthodox doctrine; if so, I cannot think that your new religion has any reason to boast of her superior excellence; unless it could indeed be proved that inconsiderate youth is more capable of the right use of reason, and forming a true judgment of divine things than mature age and manhood. Besides it does not seem to argue much in favour of Rational ministers, that they should be so heartily glad of the extinction of office-power by the death, or departure of the most serious and zealous of their members, seeing it gives but too much reason to suspect that they possessed but little zeal, and had but a very faint relish for seriousness themselves. What if the serious officers in churches were of different sentiments from the ministers, and thereby a little incommoded them? Seeing they profess themselves to be gentlemen of such universal charity and unimpeachable candour, ought not they to have borne with the supposed weakness of the Orthodox serious officers rather than to have destroyed the order and discipline of the churches?

I am, Sir,

Your very humble servant.

LETTER IX.

Reverend Sir,

IT is something unaccountable to me that the lamentable state of what you call the Rational churches with respect to church discipline, does not cause some doubt concerning the foundation upon which they build, and the religious sentiments which they really hold, seeing you give it as your opinion, “*That every set of religious sentiments must produce corresponding effects on the tempers and conduct of men.*” That the conduct of the Rational ministers in their office character deserveth but little praise you have very sufficiently shewn, and therefore from your own axiom it will be inferred that a certain malignant influence is inseparably connected with their sentiments, which hath indeed been the opinion of some grave and intelligent persons long before you or I was born. The change of conduct amongst your churches is altogether as obvious as the revolution of their sentiments from Orthodox to Rational is remarkable, the cause of which you have ingeniously accounted for in the conduct of their ministers. It is indeed astonishing that, in the days of Orthodoxy when all the Dissenters were as

you think absurd and irrational, yea even idolaters * that their churches should have been on a regular gospel plan, and that their more Rational descendants in these days of such enlightened reason should confessedly “*be destitute of the common requisite of growth, or even the continuance of any society whatever †.*” This being evidently the case with them, your censure, “*that with all their superior knowledge they are destitute of what they call common sense ‡,*” seems to be extremely pertinent and judicious. That a goodly measure of common sense fell to the lot of my old friends the puritanical Dissenters, notwithstanding their idolatry, in worshipping the Son according to the divine command §, even as they worshipped the Father, and other absurdities of which they were guilty as you clearly demonstrate, pag. 50. In your very friendly debate with your Rev. brother Enfield you have in great modesty laid the charge of idolatry against all Athanasians, and expressed your wonder that he should endeavour to vindicate them from your charge, as he is said to have done in *his trimming business of a Dissenter, &c.* You know the Puritans in general were Athanasians, and therefore according to you,

* Dr. Priestley's Letter to Mr. Enfield.

† Page 13.

‡ Page 133.

§ John v. 23. “That all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.”

Idolaters. Moreover you are pleased frequently to give us an hint of the absurdity and inconsistency of the Calvinistical doctrines, which being considered as the opposite of Rational doctrines must by you be understood as irrational; of course the case stands thus, “the old Puritans were both irrational and idolatrous, yet after all had common sense enough to form their churches upon a regular gospel plan, as you tell us, and to maintain a strictness of discipline subservient to the best of purposes. Nor was this the case in one or two communities as a wonder of order amidst their absurdities; but on your own testimony it was so universally, “for all the Puritans and Presbyterians formed their churches upon this plan*.” It is very strange, Doctor, that with all your Rationality, “this regular form of a church and the discipline to which it is subservient should be now almost universally grown into disuse with you.” According to the easy rules of common sense, it must be

* “The English Puritans however, so early as Q. Elizabeth’s reign, proposed to change the church-wardens and overseers of the poor into elders and deacons, Neale, vol. 1. page 232. They held that the elders joined with the ministers should be overseers of the manners and conversation of all the congregation; that they should be chosen out of the gravest and most discreet members, that they should also be of some note in the world, and able if possible to maintain themselves. As far, says Dr. Priestley, as their circumstances would permit, all the old Puritans and Presbyterians formed their churches upon this plan; but this regular form of a church, and the discipline to which it was subservient, are now almost universally grown into disuse among us.”

very difficult to account for it, how men who are inconsistent and irrational should maintain regularity and order, whilst the Rational and intelligent, or as you more emphatically stile them, persons of superior knowledge, have not even the remotest idea of church order; in-somuch that as you say, “there is hardly the face of any thing that may be called discipline among you.”

You cannot think, Sir, how it pleases me to find such a gentleman as yourself, touching so frequently on the marvellous: of which we have yet another instance in page 37, “*the whole system of discipline among the Independents has no countenance in our only rule of faith and duty, and no example for many centuries in the Christian church.*” That this should be the case, is not so strange, as to have it asserted by Dr. Priestley; who in the last passage I had the honour of quoting from him, highly applauds the same system of church discipline. Had you read, Dr. Owen on Church Discipline for the old Puritans, and Mr. Maurice’s Social religion exemplified, on the part of modern Independents you must have seen that there is in fact no material difference between them. Therefore how *that* of the old Puritans was so regular and orderly, and *this* of the Independents so universally unscriptural, absurd, and dangerous, are matters of no small importance, and will require a genius not inferior to your own to determine.

Nevertheless were I to give my own sentiments upon the subject, I should think that, “*an almost perfect uniformity of faith, and also the religion of the heart with respect to God **,” are far from being proper objects of ridicule, and should suppose that this may have at least a remote likeness to what the apostle means by “being of one mind,” and surely an almost perfect uniformity of faith is better than to have no faith all; which if I understand you aright, you suppose may be the case with not only Rational Dissenters, but even with their very officers. “*In this manner truth might be propogated more silently; and if once the elders or the majority of them were convinced, there would be less difficulty in bringing over the rest †.*”

’Tis very true Sir, that when gentlemen of the Rational order are pleased to take the propogation of *truth* into their own hands, they have need to use all their cunning, and go as silently about it as possible; though to be sure the scriptural method of propogating the gospel was somewhat more noisy, and its first preachers lifted up their voices like a trumpet, and shunned not to declare the whole council of God: but I suppose that two schemes so very different as the gospel preached by the apostles, and Rational religion as defined by Dr. Priestley, must needs require methods of propogation equally different. I have always

been of opinion that truth could hold up her countenance in the face of the sun, but you seem to be of a contrary opinion; and as I am not yet satisfied in my own infallibility, I shall not be too strenuous in this point, but shall reserve my anathema till a fitter occasion.

I really wonder whether or not you are serious Doctor, in advising your people to choose elders whether they are convinced of the truth, or enemies to it? I have been so accustomed to consider Paul's epistles to Timothy and Titus, as containing good and authentic rules, for forming a just idea of the qualities of church officers, that with me an elder who is not as yet convinced of the truth, appears to be an odd kind of an animal; but no matter for that, seeing I have not the honour of being counted a Rationalist. Yet in our way of judging of things by common sense without any pretence to superior knowledge, we should think a man who is yet unconvinced of the truth, however rich, far from being the fittest man in the world for watching over the conversation of a religious society. Moreover, we should be apt to conclude that a consistory formed of one Rational minister, and twelve unbelieving elders, is such a convention, as the wisdom of all the apostles could not have devised.

There is yet another thing in which the first preachers of the gospel and you are by no means agreed as to the choice of church of-

ficers; and what is very observable, Sir, is, that what you take to be a necessary quality for office power was never once thought on by them, any more than you have thought of what they accounted necessary. In page 86, you direct “*that one of the wealthiest be chosen for an elder.*” But they never once thought of riches or poverty in the case of choosing deacons, but simply directed to choose “*men full of faith and of the Holy Ghost,*” as very sufficient through divine assistance for sustaining offices in a gospel church. After all it must needs be confessed that churches which are established upon a different foundation, will require officers possess of different qualifications: how far this may be the case with the Rational Dissenters, I hope you do not expect me to determine. One thing I must take the liberty of cautioning you against, Doctor, and that is to beware of flattering yourself that you are the first who found out that riches are a necessary qualification for a church officer; for I can assure you that the Orthodox Dissenters themselves, absurd as you think them, have been in possession of this secret for time immemorial, and in the whole extent of this great metropolis you will not find one poor man a deacon in any church whatever, providing always that, there be any rich men belonging to the community. Ay, Sir! so universal is this rule, that you cannot give a tradesman a better

character as being a good man in worldly circumstances, than to say *he is a deacon of such a church*; therefore it will be ungenerous for you in future to pretend that Rational religion dwells wholly with your people, seeing I have proved to a demonstration that in the article of choosing their officers, the Orthodox are as Rational as yourselves. Further, if my informer deceives me not, the Sandemanian church in St. Martin's le Grand, that mirror of gospel simplicity, is pretty observant of the same rule, and her elders are thought to stand upon a par with the deacons of other churches, in respect to the good things of this life. Indeed it is pretty obvious, that those same elders, who receive nothing for preaching, are full as comfortable as the Dissenting ministers who live entirely by the gospel. I cannot but admire their prudence in choosing to be put into trade, whereby they may procure hundreds instead of the few scores of pounds usually raised by subscription. This wise choice hath two very great advantages attending it; first, it gives them an authority equal to that of rich lay elders, because of their equal independancy; and secondly, it gives them authority to treat those ministers with contempt, whose subsistence entirely depends on the subscriptions of their people. Indeed, Sir, to be put into an handsome way of trade by the generosity of a church is at least equivalent to a very good annual stipend; be-

sides the many other advantages connected with it. How then can you pretend that reason dwells only with you, seeing the very Sandemanians themselves outstrip you in making comfortable provisions for their preachers, even when they give themselves out to be the most disinterested race of human beings? I give it as my opinion, that whenever the Orthodox shall take it into their heads to make provision for their teachers after the example of that *only church* in St. Martins le grand, they will find but little opposition from their ministers, who would be every whit as well contented with two hundred pounds per annum, in a way of trade, as with one hundred in a way of subscription; and I dare answer for it, that the good women their wives will unanimously vote for the Sandemanian plan, whenever the affair is agitated.

As you observe, Sir, with respect to yourself, so I may say that, “*I am far from censuring those persons who are merely misled,*” yet I think they are very worthy of censure who, pretending to *superior knowledge* themselves, neglect the true, the only spring of spiritual intelligence more and more every day, as you tell us, is the case with the Rational Dissenters of your acquaintance; with whom, “*it is notorious that the scriptures are every day more neglected, so that it is justly to be feared that in a few generations, our posterity will have but a very imperfect idea of the con-*

tents of those sacred books *, which with me is by no means an incontestible proof, either of their superior knowledge or piety, and may be thought by some to be but a very flimsy ground for their boasted Rationality. I am entirely of your opinion that the scriptures are grown almost into a total disuse with the Rational Dissenters; ministers as well as people; for such of them whom I have heard preach, most evidently drew more of their matter from Plato, Socrates, and Seneca, than from the disciples of our Lord in their writings of inspiration. That posterity is likely to have but a very imperfect idea of the contents of those sacred books must certainly be admitted, seeing so many teachers have already attained to that degree of Rationality. When the apostles of your persuasion first began to exclaim against creeds, confessions, and systems in general, it was done under a pretence of adhering more closely to the inspired writings. Creeds, articles, and confessions of faith, bodies of divinity, and catechisms, are all gone Dr. Priestley, and must the bible itself likewise be superannuated? What rule do you think those gentlemen will next embrace? Dr. Harwood has done all that could be expected from such a circumscribed genius to throw the New Testament into a more polite and gentleman-like form, but alas! there is this small disadvantage attending his (what shall I call it) version,

that even Rational gentlemen, possessed of the smallest degree of either piety or common sense, can hardly give him thanks for his labours. But that the bible which we make use of should grow daily into more general disuse is what might reasonably be expected, seeing it is so very full of Orthodoxy, and testifies very solemnly against the leading sentiments of the Rational Dissenters. When the old fashioned bible is grown into absolute disuse with your people, and they are unanimously agreed to have a new one, better adapted to their views of things, if they should do me the honour to petition my advice on the occasion, I shall refer them to the Rev. Dr. Harwood who may as well undertake to make a new bible as to mend the old one. If they can but procure a bible of Dr. Harwood's composing, with annotations by George Williams, gentleman's servant, his intimate friend, they will be on a fair way of being as Rational as the most rational of Indians.

Now Dr. Priestley to give you another proof of my freedom with you, which is always a token of friendship, give me leave to tell you that the Orthodoxy which I approve, is all summed up, and lies very obvious in this little old bible of mine; nor do I hope ever to be able to hold a man to be rational or irrational, but as he adheres to or departs from, the lovely beauty of its divine contents. I think I shall envy no man his Orthodoxy on

the one hand, nor his Rationality on the other, if I may but see the loveliness of Jesus in the scriptures and by them be made wise unto salvation.

I really think that it is not unworthy of the most Rational of all the Rational Dissenters to enquire seriously into the cause of this growing neglect of the scripture which you speak of; and should it be found that it is in the ministry itself, suitable measures for remedying the evil will, I hope, be thought the next object worthy of attention. It does not appear to me, that any thing has a more direct tendency to bring the scriptures into a contemptible disuse, than the manner of preaching practised by some ministers, whose orations or harangues seem to have no dependance upon, or connection with, the sacred writings. Lectures on natural or indeed moral philosophy, are very far from leading the soul to Jesus as its all sufficient dependance, and however excellent as a science, is contemptible, base, and spurious, when it assumes the name of gospel. Were Jesus Christ and him crucified more the preacher's theme, and instead of embellishing his composition by the flourishes of art and science, he studied to recommend the word to every man's conscience. I think the people would be under a necessity with the Bereans to search the scriptures, that they might know the truth of the doctrine.

Now, Sir, to come to a conclusion, give me

leave to observe to you that, if to despise and vilify the Orthodox because they differ from me ; if to boast of my own superior knowledge ; if to hold sentiments in private, which I dare not openly avow ; if to abolish church officers, and let go the reins of discipline ; and if to diffuse the scriptures is what is called Rational religion, I must beg to be excused from embracing her, notwithstanding.

I am, Sir,

Your sincere well-wisher,

and humble servant.

To the Rev. Joseph Priestley, L. L. D. F. R. S.

LETTER X.

Reverend Sir,

MANY months are now elapsed, since I did myself the honour, of transmitting to you nine familiar Epistles, written according to the humour *, which happened then to be regent in my fancy. But alas, had I been as impatient for your answer, as Mr. Enfield is said to have been, on a similar occasion, I might by this time, through a tedious disappointment, have been reduced to a state of, either death or insanity. But although I have had the mortification to receive no answer, I cannot prevail with myself to decline the pleasure of writing to you again, how much soever you may be ashamed of your connections with such an absurd writer. Especially as you persist in your resolution to vilify the person of my only LORD and Saviour; to divest him of

* "Humour which then happened to be regent," &c. In the letters referred, the Author was of opinion, that the weakness, absurdity and contradiction, joined with a spirit of ostentation, obvious in Dr. Priestley's religious pamphlets, were more proper subjects of ridicule, than of serious disquisition: He therefore refers here to the manner, or form, not to the matter or substance of those letters.

his Godhead, without which nothing can render him amiable and lovely in the eye of an awakened sinner. Besides, I consider myself as bound to a further correspondence with you, from a passage near the end of my fifth letter in the former Packet, intimating my resolution to address you again, whenever you should see meet again openly to write against the doctrine of CHRIST'S DIVINITY. You have now, Sir, furnished the occasion, and virtually called upon me to resume my pen, according to promise, by the publication of your "*Appeal to the serious and candid professors of Christianity*;" and your "*Familiar illustration of certain passages of scripture.*" When the above pamphlets first came abroad, I paid little regard to them, seeing they were anonymous; but they being now ascertained, the productions of your intrepid pen, I have thought proper to peruse them with attention, and to animadvert upon them after my own manner; a manner with which, by this time, you are in some measure acquainted.

I do not mean to give you a regular answer, to the pamphlets in question; no, Sir, I leave regular answers to regular, thinking people, who can have patience and leisure to follow you from page to page, and from line to line; I shall at present satisfy myself with attending to one single article, "THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST," concerning which, we differ as widely as possible.

In perusing your penny Appeal, I was amazingly struck, with the force and propriety of the concluding paragraph, in article FIFTH, which militates against the divinity of IMMANUEL; and which I think proper here to transcribe; notwithstanding it will give you some reason to conclude, that I begin at the wrong end of my work, which you know some people can do and make nothing of it. “The great Creed of the Mahometans say you is, that *there is One God, and Mahomet is his Prophet.* Now that Mahomet is not the prophet of God, it is to be hoped, they may, in time, be made to believe; but we must not expect, that they will so easily give up their faith in the unity of God.”

Being engaged in the same great work of Reformation with yourself, and wishing to see true and undefiled Religion diffusing itself from sea to sea, from the river even to the ends of the earth; I have thought of a coalition of the Mohammedan and Christian Religions, as the most feasible scheme. Therefore I altered the Mohammedan Creed, and read it thus. “There is but ONE GOD, and JESUS is his Prophet.” This, Sir, is admirably adapted to the rational scheme, and may well be called the Socinian’s Creed; between which, and that of the Mohammedans, there is but barely the difference of one syllable, and that too not very material, on your supposition, that both Jesus and Mohammed are

but men like ourselves. You know, Sir, it is a matter of vastly momentous controversy, which of two persons, by nature on an exact level with each other, and with ourselves also, shall be by us, exalted to pre-eminence, according as they shall severally appear to be entitled, by their Doctrines, and their Labours, to promote the good of mankind. The question then will be, Whether the Mohammedans shall receive the prophet JESUS, who is but a man like themselves; or Rational Christians shall receive the prophet Mohammed, who is also a man like themselves, and as they allow, a man of the first attainments? The solution of this important Question shall be the subject matter of the following Epistles, which I hope will furnish you with two or three hours precious entertainment.

But before I proceed to this solution, you will please to give me leave to lay a suitable foundation, for the coalition of parties, which I have proposed between Mohammedans and rational Christians; by pointing out their essential agreement, respecting the person and offices of JESUS CHRIST. For if we can but find, that there is no essential difference between the Mohammedans and rational Christians, respecting his person; names, circumstances, and such lesser matters, may the sooner be got over. So that if we succeed, the eastern world may either become rational Christians, or what you call the rational part

of the western world may become Mohammedans. Which of the two shall be the event, is not very material; the difference appearing, either very trivial, or the advantage greatly on the side of the Arabic prophet, as perhaps the sequel may discover.

In your conversion of the Mohammedans, to rational Christianity, it will not be necessary that they should give up their faith in the Unity of GOD; their faith in this article, being identically the same with your own, as will appear on the comparison. Were we even to attempt their conversion to real Christianity, they needed not to part with their belief of the UNITY of the divine Essence, only to adopt the TRINITY, into their faith in the Unity of GOD; as the opposite of Unity in this sense, was never received by real Christians in any age, not even by the Athanasians themselves. No, Sir, it is only a slander raised against them, by Gentlemen of learning, of natural virtue, and of rational religion; who, to serve a turn, will not scruple to bely, even their most consciencious neighbours. Witness the reverend Dr. Priestley's writings; especially his Essay on Church Discipline*.

To prove my assertion, that Mohammed's faith, and that of Dr. Priestley, are identically the same, respecting the unity of GOD, permit me, Sir, to quote your own words, a little descant upon them, and then quote the words

* Page 17.

of the great *Prophet of Arabia*. You say *,
 “ How is it possible that three Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, should be separately, each of them, possessed of all divine perfections, so as to be *true, very, and eternal God*, and yet that there should be but one *GOD*? A truth which is so clearly and fully revealed, that it is not possible for men to refuse their assent to it, *or else it would, no doubt, have been long ago expunged from our Creed, as utterly irreconcilable with the more favourite doctrine of the Trinity*. A term not to be found in Scripture. Things above our reason may, for any thing that we know to the contrary, be true; but things expressly contrary to our reason, as that *three should be one, and one three*, can never appear to us to be so.”

That the term TRINITY is not literally to be found in Scripture is allowed; but the same may be said of the characters, “ Rational Christians,” or “ Rational Dissenters;” also of that favourite phrase of yours, “ JESUS CHRIST is only a man like ourselves;” and many other phrases, which pass current enough with you, as well as with your neighbours. However, Sir, although it must be granted, the term TRINITY is not in the Bible, it must at the same time be owned, that the thing intended by it, is found therein, whilst that passage so adverse to yours, and

* Appeal, page 16, 17.

the Mohammedan scheme, stands so firm, after all the laudable efforts of rational religion have, in vain, been exerted for its eradication. I mean—“ There are THREE that bear record in Heaven, the FATHER, the WORD, and the HOLY GHOST, and these THEEE are ONE *.

That this is above reason, to me does not very clearly appear ; and that it is contrary to reason, as you are pleased to assert, is an affront offered to the soundest maxims of philosophy. That it is not above reason to allow, that three different principles may be requisite to constitute One *intelligent Agent*, I hope Dr. Priestley himself is a living witness. You will permit me to observe, that, notwithstanding your vast capacity, you are an animal, formed of the earth like other creatures. The word animal you know is compound, and supposeth two principles, existing in the subject to which it is applied. For instance, a creature is a creature, whether it be dead or alive ; but it is not an animal unless it be alive. Here is therefore one principle, acting upon another, to compose an animal Being ; a principle which quickeneth, and a principle quickened, yet these are both requisite to constitute animal existence. Besides these two principles, you have about you an immortal spirit, which must live for ever in a state of unspeakable bliss, or of infinite misery. This immortal spirit, dwelling in

* 1 John v. 7.

your animal frame, is that third principle which, joined to the other two, constitutes you a self-conscious intelligent Agent. These three, thus joined, do not make three men, but one man, so that it is neither contrary to, nor above reason, that One may be three, and three, ONE; for although you subsist Soul, Body and Spirit, you are not three Doctor Priestleys, but one Rational Dissenting Minister, or one Doctor Priestley.

The light of the sun which shines around me, affects only my eyes, and is therefore very distinct from the heat of that splendid luminary, which warms my whole body. This observation led me to examine the sky, to see if there were not two suns; one, consisting only of heat, and the other only of light. But I have not as yet found any, besides the old fashioned Sun, composed of light, and heat, *Two principles* *, *but One natural Luminary*. Even that little bit of fire, which falls to the share of some Authors, in the coldest days of winter, discovers three somethings, which seem essential to its very being. There is Light, Heat, and Motion;

* By principle, the Author does not mean that from which the sun derived its existence; but that which is essential to its existence.

Principles in physic, or of a natural body, is something that contributes to the essence of a body; or whereof a natural body is primarily constituted. Chamber's Dictionary.

Which authority, I presume, will warrant the observation immediately following upon the fire.

without which, I believe, you never saw a fire kindled in your study. The light is very different from the heat, the heat from the light; and both are distinct from that motion discernible in the fire. And yet there are not on this account three fires, but one.

Now, Sir, that an ignoramus, or what is much the same in your sense, an Orthodox Dissenter, should assert, that three distinct principles cannot exist, in one intelligent being, is no more than might be expected from their absurdity. But that a Rational Dissenter, such an adept in philosophy as yourself, should assert, that the truth contained in that proposition is contrary to reason, is not so easily to be accounted for: especially as you are a living proof of it in your own proper person.

Indeed Doctor, whilst I see you and myself, consisting of soul, body, and spirit, you must permit me to deem it rational to believe, that the GODHEAD may subsist in FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST*.—But if you ask, how these THREE are ONE, and this ONE is THREE? I must beg to be excused from giving you a positive answer, till you shall have favoured me with an exact account of your own subsistence

* No more is aimed at here than to shew, that, among creatures, many may be pointed out, whose very being depends upon the union of distinct principles: The Author, invariably considering all attempts to explain the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ, as daring and impious. What is seen may be defined in time; what is unseen, must be left to eternity to unfold.

in soul, body and spirit: how far these principles in your own frame are distinct from one another, and after what manner they are united together. I verily think we ought to explain our own essence, before we attempt to explain that of our Maker. But, that you may not think I want to evade any necessary enquiry, I hereby give it you under my hand, that the moment you shall have explained to me, in a satisfactory manner, the phenomena of the Sun, of the Fire, and of the human Nature, I shall join you, in studying to comprehend the Incomprehensible, and of finding out the Almighty to perfection; a task, believe me, in which few besides ourselves ever hoped for success; but what may not the vigilant exertion of our rational powers be able to accomplish?

However, Sir, although you differ from all the reformed Churches, as well as from Christ and all his Apostles, you have the happiness of perfectly agreeing with Mohammed the great prophet of the Turkish Church, and head of all Mussulmen; as you will see by turning to the Koran, chap. cxii. "*God is One God; the Eternal God; he begetteth not, neither is he begotten; and there is not any like unto him.*" No man could express the sense of Socinians in a more agreeable and masterly manner, than this same Arabian prophet as it follows immediately has done, in his answer to the Koressh. You and this

great prophet are perfectly agreed, "that GOD is One in person as well as in essence." The Christian Church has indeed in all ages been of a different opinion from Mohammed, believing in the ONLY BEGOTTEN of the FATHER full of grace and truth; and has thought that he could beget only his own image. Mohammed is in my opinion, however, rather more consistent than yourself, as he entirely excludes begetting in GOD, because, as he says, there is none like unto him: but you allow of begetting, and that, what is begotten of him, is the very image of his perfections; and at the same time, is but a man like ourselves. Of the two, commend me always to the most consistent, as the most rational, and fit to be followed.

It is now time, to shew your agreement with the same prophet, respecting the person of Jesus of Nazareth; but I beg leave to postpone it till I have the pleasure, and honour of writing to you again; which shall be as soon as I think you have fairly digested this.

I am, Rev. Sir,

Your most humble Servant,

J. MACGOWAN.

LETTER XI.

Reverend Sir,

It is beyond a doubt, that people have differed greatly in their opinions, respecting the person of Jesus Christ. Some have taken him to be the Christ, the Son of the Living God, with Peter and the Disciples; to be Immanuel, God with us, or God manifested in the flesh, with Isaiah, and the apostle Paul; even to be the Child born, the Son given, who is the mighty God, the everlasting Father. But on the other hand, he was by a different set of men thought to be, but a *mere man like ourselves*; one that had no power, nor authority, but what was derived. Of this opinion were the Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, Herod, Pontius Pilate, and Mohammed: of this opinion are Doctor Priestley, Mr. Graham, and all their Arian and Socinian brethren.

That you, Sir, differ from all the confessions ever made, by the reformed Churches, whether Lutheran, or Calvinistic, respecting the person of Jesus of Nazareth, is matter of your consolation, glorying and boasting. My business in this Letter, shall be to furnish you with greater grounds of boasting; by shewing the

amazing affinity between your sentiments, and those of the prophetic Arabian, after whose doctrine, almost all the eastern world has wondered for the space of six hundred years and upwards. After such a feather added to the plumage of your cap, Will you ever in future, assert, "that you are ashamed of your connections with that absurd Shaver?"

To have such a colleague, as the great *Mohammed*, must no doubt yield you the highest satisfaction, and most exquisite delight; provided we can but make clear your title to such a dignity; a dignity which undoubtedly must add a lustre to the name of rational deïenter, already so honourable with the thinking and wise. Therefore I shall endeavour, in this epistle to point out the ONENESS of *Mohammedanism*, and what is by you, and your friends called *Rational Religion*.

You know, Sir, the leading principle of both religions, on the point before us, respecting Jesus of Nazareth is, "That he is but a man like ourselves;" or, as in some places you express it more emphatically, "A man, in all respects, like ourselves;" by which some would think, that even sin itself is not excepted; for were that to be excepted, he could not be in all respects like ourselves; unless, indeed, it could be proved that we are not sinners, and this perhaps might be attended with some degree of difficulty.

To investigate a subject of this importance

requires some degree of method and perspicuity. We shall therefore begin with that position of yours, viz. “ That Jesus Christ is not God, nor equal to God in any sense, “ always keeping in our view your entire agreement with the prophet Mohammed. That wonderful man expressly declares,* that “ they are infidels, who say, verily God is Christ the Son of Mary.” And again, † “ The Christians say *Christ* is the Son of God. May God resist them. How are they infatuated ?” Surely, Doctor, no man could better have expressed your sentiments, than *Master Mohammed* has done. Your whole business, for years past, has been to oppose those who believe in Christ, as God over all blessed for evermore. With the Turkish prophet, you have not only charged all the Athanasians with infidelity, but even with idolatry.

Our Archbishops and Bishops are all sworn Athanasians, and therefore according to you Idolaters, and according to Mohammed Infidels. This, Sir, is a specimen of your charity and candour, and must greatly tend to recommend rational Christianity, if opprobrious names are deemed the fittest arrows of conviction, and abuse the most proper method of manifesting our candour. Mohammed well knew, that the person who should be owned the only begotten SON of GOD, must be in all

* Kor. ch. vi. 133

† Ch. ix. 244.

respects the only true and living GOD; on which account he considers it as infidelity and blasphemy to call Jesus by that name, SON OF GOD. In this, therefore, he discovers more prudence than yourself, for, as I observed towards the close of my last, you own him to be the SON OF GOD, and notwithstanding will have him to be no more than a man like yourself, forgetting the true character of the Child born, the SON given. That Mohammed then should deem the Christians infidels, for calling Jesus the SON of GOD, is not half so strange as your charging us with Idolatry, because we honour the SON, even as we honour the Father.

Making mention of the SON of GOD, brings to my mind a saying of yours *, where you address the people thus, “ You have been taught to believe that Jesus Christ, whose proper title is the SON of Man, as well as the SON of GOD, was *not Man*, but very and eternal God himself.” I freely confess, that we have been taught to believe in him as the true GOD and eternal life; but then, Sir, we have been taught to believe in him as Man also: therefore you have here done great injustice to our teachers, and ought to retract your assertion, if you wish to support your reputation for probity; unless, indeed, you can vindicate it, and demonstrate, that we have actu-

* Appeal, pag. 12.

ally been taught to believe, that Jesus is not a Man of the seed of David after the flesh.

Having had the felicity to point out the *one-ness* of the Mohammedan, with the rational faith of Socinians, respecting the person of Jesus of Nazareth, we may now enquire how far you and that celebrated prophet are agreed, respecting his work and mission. The words of the *Koran* * are very expressive, and analogous to your own absurd system. “ O Mary ; verily, GOD sendeth thee good tidings, that thou shalt bear the WORD † proceeding from himself ; his name shall be CHRIST JESUS the SON of MARY ; honourable in this world, and in the world to come, and one of those who approach near to the presence of God,—and he shall be righteous ;—GOD shall teach him the Scriptures and Wisdom, the Law and the Gospel, and shall appoint him his Apostle to the Children of Israel ; and he shall say, verily, I come to you with a sign from the LORD ; for I will perform miracles by *the permission of GOD* : I will heal him that hath been blind from his birth, and the leper ; and I will raise the dead by *the permission of GOD*. I come to confirm the law which was revealed before me, and to allow unto you as lawful, part of that which hath been forbidden you—Therefore fear GOD and

* Chap. 3. page 63.

† Dr. P. says, Christ is called the Word of God on account of his being in a more eminent manner commissioned to declare the will of God.

obey me. Verily, GOD is my LORD and your LORD; therefore serve him." The prophet Mohammed, in all this description of Jesus, hath rationally taken care to prevent his followers considering him as GOD; the better to prevent which, he ascribes all his miracles to the permission of GOD, as is observed by his judicious Commentators*.

The pharisees and scribes were also of opinion, that Jesus was a teacher sent from God; believing upon good grounds, that no man could do those works he did, unless GOD were with him to give him power to work such miracles; perfectly agreeing with Mohammed's notion, that Jesus wrought all his miracles by a Divine permission.

You also, and other Socinians, are firmly of opinion, that the whole of rational faith consists, in believing in CHRIST as a teacher sent from GOD, commissioned to work miracles, and to publish the new law called the Gospel; that is, so to moderate the old law, as to render the way of Salvation practicable and easy. You say †, "Christ being appointed the King and Judge of men, has powers given to him adapted to those offices, especially the knowledge of the human heart, and the prerogative of declaring the forgiveness of sin, which always accompanies regal authority; but being assisted by Divine wis-

* Koran, pag. 64, Lett. e.

† Familiar illust. pag. 22.

dom and discernment, as well as by Divine power in the exercise of this high office; it is, in effect, the same thing, as the judgment and mercy of GOD displayed by the instrumentality of Jesus Christ."

To this agree the words of Mohammed *, "Jesus is no other than a servant, favoured with the gift of prophecy, appointed for an example to the children of ISRAEL; and he shall be a sign of the approach of the last hour." Here Jesus is a servant, consequently commissioned of GOD; favoured with the gift of prophecy; therefore, as you say, had communications from GOD, appointed as an eminent example to ISRAEL, being commissioned to declare the will of God. So far, then, there is a perfect agreement between you and the great prophet of the Mussulmen; as you may see in the foregoing quotation from *Al Koran*.

Orthodox Christians in every place, and in every age, have, indeed, embraced the Redeemer of mankind, as the blessed IMMAUEL, GOD manifest in the flesh. But the respectable Pharisees, Scribes, and Doctors of old, the Mohammedans, the Socinians and Arians, are all united in opposition to his proper and personal Deity, even when they acknowledge him a Teacher sent from GOD, and performing works peculiar to himself.

Once more, reverend Sir, Mohammed and

† Kor. 360.

you are perfectly agreed, respecting the ignorance of Christ, as to the day of Judgment, You say *, “ Notwithstanding the Divine communications with which our Lord was favoured, some things are expressly said to be withheld from him. For he himself, speaking of his second coming, says, Mark 13. 32. “ But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the Angels which are in Heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.” The Orthodox, to be sure, have always understood our blessed Lord, as speaking here of his human nature only; and not without ground suppose, that, seeing as a Divine person, he does whatsoever the FATHER does, he must as such know, whatsoever the FATHER knoweth. Moreover, that the FATHER, in many passages of Scripture, intends the Deity in the Unity of its Essence, and the Son, the man Jesus, or the human nature of the Redeemer, standing in union with the divine nature. Hence they suppose, that whatsoever might be hidden from him as *Man*, was not hidden from him as a Divine person. Some even think, that although this secret was hidden from Jesus, as man, during the first or second year of his ministry, it was certainly revealed to him afterwards. Because he himself asserts that all Judgment is committed to the SON, which they think requires an infallible knowledge, *how, when, and whom* to judge, which

* Appeal. pag. 13.

could not be possessed, were the time of judgment concealed from him. Yea, he farther declares, that all power in heaven and earth was given unto him, which surely implies the knowledge of the proper times for the execution of this power.

But Sir, although my idolatrous Brethren, the Orthodox, and myself, have the infelicity of thus differing from the rational and virtuous Socinians; Mohammed the Great, declares himself entirely on your side of the question. Hear him, ye Socinian Doctors *, “ They will ask thee (says Gabriel) concerning the last hour, at what time its coming is fixed? Answer, verily, the knowledge thereof is with my LORD; none shall declare the fixed time thereof except he. The knowledge thereof is with GOD alone; but the greater part of men know it not.” This prophet goes even somewhat farther and alledgeth five things, of which he says, Jesus was ignorant. Thus from the most perfect agreement between rational Christians and Mohammedans, in the essentials of religion, I think we have the fairest prospect of accomplishing an union.

Nothing now remaining but a few circumstances, which may easily be got over by men of genius and resolution.

The only difficulty to settle is, whether Jesus and rational Christianity, or Mohammed

* Kor. ch. vii. 219.

and the Turkish religion, shall be embraced? To determine which, it will be necessary to enquire after the manner of Dr. Abbadie, which of them, according to your system of rational religion was the best preacher, and maintained the fairest and most consistent character, as a good man, commissioned of GOD to be an instructor of mankind. The consequence of which will be, that either the Socinians scheme must be reprobated, and the doctrines of Orthodoxy be embraced, or we must all become Mohammedans, in order to preserve a consistent character. Then, Sir, I presume, that you and myself will bid fair for being two of the first characters of the new modelled church; a character surely not unworthy of the utmost exertion of all our rational powers.

In great hope of success, and the dawnings of that approaching glory.

I remain,

RVREREND SIR,

Yours, &c.

J. MACGOWAN.

LETTER XII.

Reverend Sir,

You will recollect, that in the close of my last, I promised to attend to the resolution of that important point, whether the religion of Jesus, according to the Socinian Hypothesis, or that of the prophet Mohammed shall be universally embraced, as you know it must be a very desirable thing to have only one religion over the whole world; and especially, if we could get ourselves promoted to be leaders in that blessed system, and plan of operation.

The whole matter will, I imagine, rest on this single article, which of the two prophets appears to be most faithful, wise, charitable, and zealous for the glory of God; or, in other words, whether Christ or Mohammed is the better man, and sustains the most consistent character. This is, indeed, a matter of hazardous enquiry, and what few besides rational Christians would dare to attempt; what I at least should not be bold enough to undertake, had the subject been entirely new. But the ingenious, judicious Dr. Abbadie has paved my way, in his excellent Treatise on

Christ's Divinity; a Treatise which I earnestly recommend to the perusal of every rational Christian, every intelligent Dissenter.

The nature of the subject requires a considerable degree of seriousness, therefore you will be obliging enough to forgive me, if I should dismiss the smile, which used to play on my countenance when I dealt in controversy heretofore. The present disquisition is no less serious, than, to determine for certainty, whether you, Sir, and your rational brethren, be blasphemers; or myself, and the rest of the Orthodox be Idolaters, as you have most candidly represented us.

There is an infinite distance, you know, between the Creator, and the most dignified of all his creatures; therefore GOD cannot be represented as a mere creature without blasphemy, nor can the creature be adored as GOD, without the most monstrous Idolatry. If then, JESUS CHRIST be the true God and eternal life, it must be blasphemy to say, "that he is but a man like ourselves." And if he is but a man like ourselves, or but a mere Creature, how dignified soever, we must be guilty of shocking Idolatry, in worshipping him, even as we worship the FATHER, as GOD over all, blessed for evermore*. You cannot be offended, Sir, with my bringing the matter to this issue, seeing you have so illiberally charged

* Vid. Dr. Abbadie, pag. 6, of his Treatise on Christ's Divinity.

the Orthodox with Idolatry, though it should even turn out, that, before I have done, I should convict you yourself, of blasphemy against God in the human nature, and the grossest rebellion against your Judge, of which you are capable. If I worship him according to the Scriptures, you must be condemnable for rejecting him; and I must be condemnable for worshipping him provided he is that mere Creature you are pleased to represent him.

It is an observation made by some, that those who doubt the Divinity of Jesus Christ, must also doubt the Divinity of the Scriptures. Which observation seems to be warranted, from the proceedings of rational Christians in our day. One nibbles at this part of the sacred volume, another nibbles at that; for instance, the Song of Solomon is very offensive to some, the Apocalypse to others; whilst some of their brethren are equally offended with the book of Daniel, part of the Prophecies of Ezekiel and Zechariah, some of the Psalms, and many passages of even the Pentateuch itself. Which spirit of Scepticism evidently betrays a doubt of the authenticity of the whole volume of inspiration. This accounts for the new name (not on a white-stone) given by some to rational Dissenters, I mean that of *Christian Deists*; for which distinction they have as yet discovered very little thankfulness to their benefactors. The Trinitarians, on their part, think it not consistent to suppose,

that God should create a whole race of rational intelligent beings, and leave them without any given law, any obligation to walk according to his will; therefore they conclude, that some revelation of his mind has been given and preserved in the world for the general use of mankind; that wherever it is given, it must be an entire perfect revelation. They have carefully examined all the writings of the learned and wise, from Moses down to Dr. Priestley, and find on examination, that no book bids so fair for being that inspired Code of laws, as this same blessed, though antiquated book, the Bible; consequently the carping and cavillings of modern sceptics, against this and the other part of revelation, cannot to them be very agreeable.

You have been pleased to dignify our people with the name of Idolaters. When this fit of zeal for rational religion was upon you, I hope you considered maturely the import of the charge, as opposite to the glory of God and our own salvation, and indeed incompatible with either. Idolatry introduceth more Gods than one, as Mohammed charges all the Christians with doing, and with which you yourself are pleased to charge all the Orthodox, *i. e.* the king upon the throne, the bishops upon the bench, all the conscientious clergy of the established church, as well as those among Dissenters, who can subscribe the doctrinal articles of the church of England.

Indeed to worship the Lord Jesus Christ, as we do, if he is, as you say, only a man like ourselves, must be more contrary to the glory of God than the grossest Paganism. This is to advance a mere creature, yea, a creature not of the highest order in the creation, to all intents and purposes, to an equality with the infinite Jehovah. Idolatry more shocking than was ever devised in nations, the most barbarous, for they never exalted their subordinate Deities, to an equality with him whom they accounted supreme*. Idolatry then, Sir, being so very heinous in itself, so dreadful in its consequences, and the worshipping of Jesus Christ as God, equal to the Father, being the very worst species of idolatry, according to you and the prophet Mohammed; it is high time it were eradicated, and a more consistent system adopted.

You say, that there are not THREE that bear record in heaven, and in effect, that it is

* Hear, therefore, and consider, ye Orthodox; your religion is the rankest of all Idolatry, if it is true that your Redeemer is but a mere Man, in all respects like yourselves. Know assuredly, that Christian Idolatry, is the very worst Idolatry that ever was invented.

It is as contrary to the true interests of the immortal soul, as it is to the glory of God. For if you are Idolaters, according to the Rev. Dr. Priestley's representation, you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven; consequently you must all be damned. Idolaters are shut out from the kingdom of God; this rational gentleman has proved (I mean, asserted) that all Trinitarians are Idolaters, therefore you must either be shut out, or he must appear to be a lying prophet, as well as his friend Mohammed.

a villaniously interpolated passage which asserts there are. The prophet *Mohammed* also has repeatedly declared his implacable enmity against the Doctrine of the TRINITY, as irreconcilable to his scheme of reformation. According to this, it will, it must appear, that Christianity had, by some fatality, corrupted the true religion and that Mohammed restored it to its pristine purity. That the immediate followers of Jesus worshipped him as God, let their writings bear witness: and that in after ages, that corruption was indulged, your own writings sufficiently testify; therefore, beyond a doubt, religion was corrupted in the first ages of Christianity, seeing the people were then addicted to worship the SON, even as they worshipped the FATHER. But *Mohammed* arose, a great prophet and reformer; he corrected the errors of Christianity, and taught the people to worship ONE GOD, in one person only, just as you would have us to do; and to obey one prophet, even as you would wish a teacher sent from God to be obeyed. The Orthodox, indeed, in an invariable manner, have to this day continued to worship FATHER, SON, and HOLY GHOST; believing that there is no medium between CHRIST'S being the true GOD, the same in essence with the Father, or his being an arrant *Impostor*, influenced by the spirit of Satan. But the *rationals* having imbibed the spirit of *Mohammed*, adopted the doctrines of

the *Koran*, are concerned every where to destroy the worship of the TRINITY; and especially that of JESUS CHRIST, setting up in its stead the worship of ONE GOD in one person only, and reducing JESUS, his prophet, to a level with themselves: a mere man, such as Mohammed professed himself to be. Thus it is clear to a demonstration, that the fathers have in all ages been corrupters of religion, and that the author of the *Koran*, and the Socinian Doctors have been, and still are, the true reformers, who teach us not to receive, nor acknowledge the MYSTERY OF GOD, AND OF THE FATHER, AND OF CHRIST.

So striking the harmony between Mohammed and yourself, and so very pertinent the language of his *Koran*, that I have often wondered, why you quoted not his authority to authenticate your doctrine and to confound the orthodox. Permit me, Sir, to refer you to the prophet himself*. “O ye who have received the Scriptures! Exceed not the just bounds in your religion, by raising Jesus to an equality with God; neither say of God any other than the truth. Verily, CHRIST JESUS, the SON of MARY, is the apostle of GOD and his WORD, which he conveyed into MARY, and a spirit proceeding from him. Believe therefore in God and his apostles, and say

* Kor. Ch. iv. 126.

NOT THERE ARE THREE GODS: forbear this, it will be better for you. God is but One God. Far be it from him, that he should have a Son—Christ doth not proudly disdain to be a servant unto God.”

Again, yet more, if possible, to our purpose †, “ They are surely Infidels who say, verily, GOD IS CHRIST the SON of MARY; since CHRIST said, O children of Israel! Serve God, my Lord and your Lord. Whoever shall give a companion to God, God shall exclude him from paradise, and his habitation shall be hell fire. They are certainly infidels who say, God is the third, of *Three*; for there is no God, beside one God. And if they refrain not from what they say, a painful torment shall surely be inflicted on such of them as are unbelievers.—Christ, the Son of Mary, is no more than an apostle; and his mother was a woman of veracity.—Behold how we declare them the signs of God’s Unity; and then behold, how they turn aside from the truth? Say, will ye worship any besides God, &c.”

Now from this long quotation from the prophet Mohammed, would not any body take him for a rational Dissenter, educated by such a tutor as Dr. Taylor, or Dr. Priestley? Or, in other words, Would not one, who is well acquainted with the fundamentals of the Turkish religion, on reading your polemical pamphlets, be apt to mistake you for a Mo-

† Ch. v. p. 146.

hammedan? I mean, respecting those essential principles of religion, the Doctrines of the TRINITY, and the DIVINITY OF JESUS.

The worshipping of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as *three persons* in the union of the divine essence, you say, “is the grand corruption of Christianity, and, indeed, hath changed it into idolatry.” The restoring of it therefore to its purity must be a great and good work, such as could not be effected by any other spirit, than that of truth. Now Mohammed hath effectually reformed this abuse, and has purged all the eastern world from that idolatry, to which their forefathers were addicted, in worshipping the Lord Jesus Christ, as in union with Father and the holy Ghost. How is it then, that he can be that impostor he is represented, seeing the first principles of his religion are founded according to you, in the purest truth, and he hath been the author of such a great reformation, as restoring religion from the worst kind of Idolatry, to the worship of as a God, and the acknowledgment of Jesus, One teacher divinely commissioned? Without doubt, this notable prophet was under the influence of either a good or a bad spirit, if of a good spirit, he cannot be an impostor; if of a bad spirit, how could he work such a reformation? Did the Devil consider it as his interest to have Christian Idolatry abolished, if to worship Jesus be idolatry, as you assert; Surely this would be to have

Satan divided against himself; a practice contrary to the uniform tenour of his conduct. In short it must follow, that either God is to be worshipped in Trinity in Unity, and Jesus embraced as the adorable God-Man; or that Mohammed was the true prophet of the living God. That is, in plain terms, so long as you and your friends reject the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and God, you must own yourselves to be Mohammedans, instead of rational Dissenters.

If God is not to be worshipped as TRINITY in UNITY; if JESUS is not to be received as the adorable GOD-MAN, it follows, that the whole Christian church has been in a state of the most monstrous idolatry for time immemorial; consequently that none of the Orthodox have entered into the kingdom of heaven. But if there are THREE that bear record in heaven, the FATHER, the WORD, and the HOLY GHOST; and if these THREE are ONE, it will follow, that Mohammed and his Socinian brethren are guilty of blasphemy, and must be turned over to the disposal of a just and equitable judge, who is declaredly jealous of his own glory.

Having taken up much more time than at first was intended in the preliminary part of my letter, I shall have room for little more, than to propose the plan of our future correspondence; I mean, in the present series of epistles. The leading design, you know, is

either to have what you call rational religion renounced as a dangerous, enthusiastical, and fanatical delusion; or, having your rational doctrine sufficiently authenticated, to establish the pure religion of the Mohammedans upon your foundation. In order to which, I shall shew,

1. That if Jesus Christ be nothing more than a man like ourselves, Mohammed was a wiser man than him, or all the prophets who went before him, and gave more effectual instructions to his followers.

2. If but a man in all respects like ourselves, Mohammed was more truly benevolent, and exerted himself more for the benefit of mankind, than did JESUS of Nazareth.

3. If but a man like ourselves, Mohammed was a more honest, and a better man, a far greater, and more consistent divine preacher.

4. If but a man in all respects like ourselves, Mohammed discovered far more concern than Christ did for the glory of God and the purity of religion.

These shocking propositions being properly cleared up, it will appear either, that the *Koran of Mohammed* contains the true religion; or what you call rational Christianity, is the rankest and most blasphemous enthusiasm ever yet invented to defile this world. And that according to your doctrines, Mohammed must, in all respects, have the pre-eminence: But according to the principles of the everlast-

ing gospel, he will appear to be that false prophet, associated with the beast of Rome, and Jesus Christ shall retain his glory unfulled, and his dominion for ever entire.

I am,

REVEREND SIR,

Your most humble servant.

J. MACGOWAN.

LETTER XIII.

Reverend Sir,

THE subject of this letter, being an attempt uncommonly daring, would require a degree of resolution and intrepidity, far superior to what I possess; I must therefore beg you will candidly cover, with the mantle of charity, what defects soever may spring from my timidity and ignorance; when treating on a subject of such very rare and singular discussion, as to prove the following alarming proposition. “*If Jesus Christ, the author of the Christian religion, be but a man like ourselves, Mohammed was a wiser Man than he, and gave more effectual instructions to his followers.*”

The wisdom of a man, as Dr. Abbadie observes, essentially consists in choosing the fittest means for attaining the end proposed. Therefore, Sir, what lies now before us is, to consider their different ends in the establishment of their different religions, seeing they severally stand up as heads of the two greatest sects of religionists in the whole world.

Mohammed’s design in the establishment of his religion, as acknowledged and declared

by himself, was to make known the *supreme God, to be the only living and true God*, far exalted above every other Being whatever: “*To shew that he hath no issue, no partaker with him of the Divine nature, nor any similitude whatever.*” That this was the prophet Mohammed’s leading design, will appear from his own words in a variety of places in the Koran. Where he sets forth the perfections of his heavenly Majesty, in a magnificent manner, and frequently insists on his alone right to religious adoration. I might refer you to the various passages of that uncommon book, did I not consider you as an adept in the Mussulmen learning.

That Mohammed laid his plan of reformation with the utmost sagacity and wisdom, his success, and the fruits of his doctrine testify. There is but one way by which we can judge of a preacher; that is, by the fruits of his doctrine: and he must be a greater reformer, indeed, who actually gains his point in every respect. Mohammed actually gained his proposed end effectually. He has restored the worship of one God, *in one person only*; that for six hundred years and more, not one of all his numerous followers, have ever attempted to honour the Son, even as they honoured the Father, any more than if they had been bred *rational Dissenters*, or Christian Deists. This, you must allow, demonstrates the unspeakable propriety of the measures,

his sagacity pointed out, and the power with which his doctrine was accompanied. And all this was done consistently enough, with the utmost indulgence of sensual gratification; for Mohammed was none of those reformers, who deem the crucifixion of the flesh necessary; as his eleven wives could have testified, not to mention his concubines. Here was such wisdom, as neither Christ nor his apostles ever pretended to. They had not the least notion of people getting to heaven, any other way than by that of the Cross. They considered a coalition between the world and true religion, as a thing impracticable, and therefore never attempted it. But the sagacious Mohammed, both projected and executed that desirable scheme, and he has been followed by the whole race of rational Christians with success, not a little flattering to their hopes, of an entire extirpation of the religion of the Cross.

To turn now from the prophet of the Turkish church, let us a little enquire into the measures taken by Jesus of Nazareth. Compare his success with the former, and we shall see, that in reality there is no comparison.

If, as you say*, “*It be perfectly clear from the whole tenor of the New Testament, that the person who is distinguished by the name of the Father, is the only true God, exclusive of the Son, or any other Being whatever,*”

* Fam. Illust. p. 12.

it must follow, that the leading design of his coming into the world was to establish the pure worship of the Father only, exclusive of every other Being, and that this worship must be the first principle of genuine Christianity.

If so, his success has been far inferior to that of the Turkish prophet, with respect both to the numbers of his followers, and the duration of his system in its purity. In point of number, Jesus has had very few followers, rational enough to worship One God, under any other notion besides that of Trinity in Unity; and even in our age, enlightened as it is, by your own confession, the number of rational Christians is very scanty. Whereas the successful Mohammed, has converted almost all the oriental world; so that, what was said of lady Diana of Ephesus, *that all Asia, and the world received her religion*, is more true when applied to Mohammed.

The Arabian religion has continued in its purity from its first institution, respecting its grand fundamental CREED; the whole Turkish church most stedfastly believe, "there is but ONE GOD, and that Mohammed is his prophet," and is as orthodox now as in the days of the prophet himself. But if the doctrine of the Trinity be as you say, *the grand corruption of Christianity*, it will appear, that Christ's religious system actually began to fall to pieces within the times of the apostles themselves. For in those times you tell us,

“That mystery of iniquity began to work.” Now, Sir, as we have no other method of forming a right judgment of causes, besides the effects naturally produced by them, we are under an unavoidable necessity of preferring the measures taken by Mohammed, to those adopted by Jesus, the founder of the Christian religion. Of consequence, how shocking soever of thinking, that he was the wiser man, and taught his disciples with more force of argument. Mohammed delivered his doctrine in language, plain and perspicuous, no way equivocal or ambiguous, roundly testifying, that they were infidels who believed in Christ’s Divinity, or in the doctrine of the Trinity. But when Jesus institutes the worship of One God, the Father only; what language does he use? “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever (I) have commanded you*.”

This, you know, was his last injunction to his disciples, and what is very properly considered as the institution of the Christian religion. And surely, if he hereby instituted the worship of the person of the Father only, as you will have it, he was extremely unhappy in his mode of expression, and indeed gave occasion to the corruption of his own religion, by the ambiguity of his language.

* Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.

The words of an institution of such importance should be plain and perspicuous! But who, upon reading this text, could at first glance imagine, that the worship of the Father only was intended? That although the SON and the HOLY GHOST are named along with him in the same act of worship, they are not to be worshipped with him, under pain of damnation? It is certain, that if Jesus, in this passage, instituted the pure worship of the FATHER *only*, exclusive of the SON and the Holy Ghost; he has done it in such a manner, as to render his injunction totally useless to the far greater part of his professing followers. For now more than one thousand seven hundred years are elapsed, and but a very few to this day are capable of understanding his real meaning. Indeed, how should they? Seeing his immediate disciples, on many occasions, spake in such a stile as evidently implies Deity; which obscurity of theirs, undoubtedly arose from the ambiguity of those expressions, in which their Lord and Master chose to deliver his doctrine. But I shall have occasion to give you a sample of their doctrine in a future letter; shall therefore proceed in this to shew, that if Jesus Christ is in all respects a man, and only a man like ourselves, Mohammed acted more consistently in speaking of himself.

When shall we ever find him declaring, that God and himself are one?— That those who had seen *him*, had seen the Father also—

That he came forth from the *Father*?— Or naming himself along with the FATHER, in one of the most solemn acts of religious worship? On the contrary, he frankly acknowledges himself not only to be a mere man, but even to be a sinner*. But all these things are asserted by Jesus Christ concerning himself, and he asks, who can convince me of sin? Was it a likely way to persuade the people, that God and *he* are *two distinct Beings*, to tell them, that *he* and the FATHER are One. Could he find no other way of establishing the worship of the FATHER *only*, than by asking Philip, “Have I been so long with you Philip, and yet hast thou not known me? He that hath seen me, hath seen the FATHER: and how sayest thou, shew us the FATHER? Believest thou not that I am in the FATHER and the FATHER IN ME, &c †.”

And pray what could Philip make of all this, on supposition, that his Master were in all respects but a mere man like himself? Does this bear any likeness to that clear and nervous style in which the *Koran* is written? Has not such a declaration, an evident tendency to confound Christ with the Deity, as one object of religious adoration?

One of these three things must necessarily result from the above declaration made by Christ to Philip.

* Kor. vol. 2. 378.

† John xiv. 9, 10.

1. That if he never meant to be considered as having proper Deity appertaining to him; he certainly was not a master of his own language, and did not know the influence his doctrine would produce upon the minds of men, in leading them into idolatry, by worshipping the SON, even as they worshipped the FATHER; considering the Father and the Son, in his divine nature, as one in essence. Yet the Christian idolaters, of every age and nation, have uniformly produced this text as a divine warrant for their procedure.

2. If ignorance was not the cause of such ill-judged equivocal expressions, we must have recourse to a cause still more *shocking* and tremendous to name. I mean, an impious design to impose upon the understandings of men, by making them believe, HE and the FATHER were ONE, when, in reality, they were as distant from each other, as the distance between the *Creator* and the *creature*. Yea, he evidently leads Philip to seek for the FATHER no where, but as dwelling in, and being manifested by himself. How shocking are the consequences of Socinianism? For were that doctrine true, Christ must be a far greater impostor than Mohammed; as all the abominations of the Koran, fall infinitely short of CHRIST himself, and by his apostles confounding him perpetually with GOD. The abominations of the Koran are in a manner sancti-

fied by the inviolable regard through the whole of it, uniformly paid to the unity of **GOD**.

3. If after all, it should be alledged that Jesus Christ is no impostor, but the true and faithful witness; so far from ignorance, that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge dwell in him; that, therefore, he well knew the effects which his doctrine would produce upon the hearts of his followers, it must follow, that in union with the **FATHER** and **HOLY GHOST**, he is the true **GOD** and eternal life: even **GOD** over all, blessed for evermore. But more of this in a subsequent letter, this being thrown in now, only as a preparative for what I farther intend. I shall therefore conclude the present with this observation. Namely, that if Jesus Christ be essentially One with the **FATHER**, as with my whole heart and soul I believe he is, it was quite natural for him to declare himself to be what he really is, and to address Philip in the above manner. Quite natural for him to join his own name with those of the **FATHER** and the **HOLY GHOST**, in the administration of baptism; that he should perform miracles by his own personal authority, and suffer himself to be adored as **LORD** and **GOD**.

But then, what will be the consequence of all this, less than that, Mohammed was a vile impostor; that all who deny Christ's proper Deity, are found guilty of the most abomina-

ble blasphemy : And that proud reason must be obliged to confess, it cannot comprehend the Almighty to perfection.

I am,

REVEREND SIR, &c.

J. MACGOWAN.

LETTER XIV.

Reverend Sir,

IN my last I shewed, that, if the Socinian hypothesis be the genuine doctrine of Christianity, Mohammed must have been a far wiser man, and was much more successful in establishing the true doctrine, and worship of the Creator than Jesus; notwithstanding, in performing this dreadful task, which nothing but real zeal for the honour of my divine Master could justify, my flesh shuddered with horror. How much more, when in this and the subsequent Letters I clearly prove, That if Jesus Christ be no more than a mere man like ourselves, Mohammed was not only a greater preacher, but a better man?

If it is idolatry to worship the Son; which it must be, if he is a mere creature; both of which you roundly assert; and if idolatry is so criminal in the sight of God, that those who are guilty of it, shall not inherit the kingdom of Heaven, it may be truly said, that Mohammed exerted himself more, for the good of mankind than Jesus did; and that we have profited more by his endeavours, than by all that Jesus did and suffered. This proposition

may perhaps at first make you stare, but you will be obliged either to allow it, or what will be as mortifying, to own, that you have grievously blasphemed the name of the Lord Jesus my Redeemer.

At the time when Mohammed arose, a great prophet in Arabia, the whole world lay in, either Pagan, or Christian Idolatry, Jews and avowed Atheists, only excepted. All that bore the Christian name were either Trinitarians or Arians; the first you know, you yourself have dignified with the name of Idolaters; the last, adoring Christ as a subordinate Deity, or deputed God, were likewise guilty of idolatry, though less gross than the former in its kind. I say, less gross in its kind; seeing, of all idolatry, none is so rank and shocking, as that which exalts a mere man to a perfect equality with the Father Almighty. Consequently, no idolatry so fatal to the true interests of immortal souls. This being the case, Mohammed exerted himself in such a manner, as to rescue the people from this idolatry, as far as he could carry his influence; and where there was a defect in his manner of persuasion, it was amply made up by the weight of his authority. For that prophet was one of the many, who have assumed a right, to compel people to enter the gates of Salvation, precisely in the manner which they direct. Now, if delivered from idolatry of the most damnable nature, is any

bleſſing, what amazing advantage has the world received from Mohammed. The many nations who have embraced his religion, are all worſhippers of GOD in Unity, and are all therefore, according to you, delivered from idolatry, and muſt of confequence be in a ſtate of ſalvation.

On the other hand, what has Jeſus done for the benefit of mankind, that may in any wiſe be compared with this, upon ſuppoſition, the Socinian ſcheme be true? We allow that he went about healing all manner of diſeaſes. But what is the performing a few cures, upon individuals, when compared with the redemption of the world from idolatry. As for the Jews, to whom he was primarily ſent, *they had* been cured of idolatry, before he was born of the Virgin, and at that momentous period, the bulk of that people moſt ſtrenuouſly adhered to the worſhip of the Father only; a few perſons excepted, who were waiting for God to be manifeſted in the fleſh, which manifeſtation they accounted the conſolation of Iſrael, and who worſhipped God as Trinity in Unity.

It cannot even be ſaid, that he ſaved any part of the Gentile world from idolatry; ſeeing that, when converted to the Chriſtian faith, they only changed their worſhip from bad to worſe. As undoubtedly it was leſs criminal to worſhip Diana, as a deſcendant of Jove, than to adore a mere Creature as Jehovah's

Equal in power and glory. The moment the pagans left their native gods they embraced the idol of the Christians ; so that it cannot be said, Jesus delivered any body from idolatry, according to your absurd scheme of irrational and unscriptural Divinity. If it be said, he taught the purest morality ever known in the world, I am not disposed to deny it, but to say, What avails the best system of morality, if the first principles of religion are left corrupt. The best morality founded upon idolatrous principles, will avail but little with a jealous God. And yet this must, according to your notion, be all, that the best of Christians ever enjoyed. In what a deplorable condition then, must Christ have left his people at his departure? Alas, ye Trinitarians, what must become of you ?

Should it be added, “ He gave his life in order to confirm the faith of his people ;” It may be replied, “ so have thousands of the Christian idolaters, worshippers of the Trinity ;” but what are we the better for that, if we are still left in a state of idolatry ? Besides, what real advantage to his followers, could a mere man like ourselves propose, by laying down his life for them ? What virtue could there be in his, more than in our own sufferings and death ? What a parade is here, about laying down his life to confirm the faith of his people, when in reality, the far greater part

of those, who are called by his name, remain to this day in a state of idolatry?

Moreover, if the death of Christ was designed to answer no higher ends, than to confirm the faith of his people, in the doctrine he taught, it gives the prophet Mohammed another advantage over him, which I thought not of before, under the head of Wisdom. I have observed, that Mohammed never discovered any great inclination to mortify his own flesh, much less did he ever think of giving his life; to confirm the truths of *Al Koran*; but then, he had wisdom enough to take such measures, as to render personal suffering altogether unnecessary. He thoroughly confirmed the faith of his followers, without putting himself to such vast expence, of either labour or blood. It cannot be difficult to determine which of two prophets is the greatest, from such circumstances as these: seeing that, although Christ gave even his very life, in order to obtain his end, he could not accomplish it by confirming the faith of his people, who run directly into the worship of the Trinity, and of himself, as a Divine Person: but Mohammed accomplished his utmost wish, without any such sufferings, which, undoubtedly, argues the superior propriety of the measures he adopted; and this you know implies superior wisdom. For although the giving of his life, might in some sense be an evidence of good will towards the children of men, it cannot

upon your plan of doctrine, be understood as any proof of Christ's wisdom; seeing all that has been done thereby, might have been accomplished without his dying.

It is not difficult to shew, that if Jesus Christ is but a mere man in all respects like ourselves, Mohammed was the best and most consistent prophet that ever appeared in the world. The scripture prophets for the most part, if not generally, came with the power of working miracles, yet could not restrain the people from idolatry; but he restrained from, nay, rooted out idolatry without pretending to one miracle. From Moses down to Malachi, they bare witness to Christ who was to come; but it was in such a manner, as to give the people room to think, that the promised Messiah, was something more than a mere creature; most of them absolutely confounded him with the Deity; and some of them even ascribes Deity, and all the works of creation to him in person. David, in the spirit of prophecy, for instance, saith unto the Son, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever, the scepter of thy kingdom, is a right scepter *". By which address one could not readily conceive, that the psalmist expected the singers upon *Shoshanim*, to intend no more than, "Jesus, thou art but a mere man, in all respects like ourselves," and yet, according to your irrational

* Pf. xlv. 6.

scheme, he must have intended nothing farther.

Another instance of the absurdity of this prophet, we have in Psal. cii. 25, 26, 27. Still addressing the Son of God, he says, "Of old, hast thou laid the foundations of the earth : and the heavens, the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure ; yea, all of them shall wax old as a garment ; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed. But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end." This prophet must be considered, as being either inspired by the Spirit of God, or not inspired. If inspired, then we expect from him the words of truth and soberness, even the very mind of God, with respect to what he delivers ; and at the same time we have a right to suppose, that he means what he speaks, whether it be to God or man. Of course, if he calls Jesus, God, whilst he knows him to be none other than a mere man, we have reason to question his being at all inspired. If uninspired, here must be an impious combination between him and the apostle to the Hebrews, to set up Christ not only as a pre-existent being, but as the God and Maker of all things, by which means the professors of religion have been misled into that monstrous idolatry, of worshipping Jesus as none other than God Manifested in the flesh. I say, misled them, for what man of sober sense, could suppose at first view, that

with all this majestic parade of fine words, and hyperbolical expressions, the writer meant no more, than that the person, of whom he speaks, is a mere man like ourselves, and had no existence at all prior to being born of the Virgin; consequently, that he had not the least hand in laying the foundation of the earth and the heavens? To come at which sense, will require all the efforts of human wisdom, that is, all the subtilties of Sophistry, and all the arts of evasion, and perversion. But—What shall we think or say, when we find the apostle putting David's words into the mouth of the Father Almighty, as he does Heb. i. As if David's testimony was thought insufficient, unless it proceeded from him who is of one mind, and cannot be turned? This serves only to embarrass us the more: for who can hear God the Father thus address his Son, “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever, &c. and from thence conclude that the Son is but a mere man like ourselves? Or thus, “Thou, Lord, in the beginning, hast laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands,” and still conclude, that the person thus addressed by the Father, had no being till within their 1800 years?

This is consistent enough, and a glorious description of the Son of God, on supposition, that, in union with the Father and Holy Ghost, he be the true God and eternal life;

but must be absolute nonsense, if your doctrine is true. It is ridiculous, for preachers to make use of ambiguous and hyperbolical expressions, such as must be bolted to the bran, before we can come at their real meaning, and that is the reason why I prefer Dr. Priestley to all the Arian and Socinian authors I have ever read. You speak so plainly, that he must be a blockhead indeed, who does not understand your meaning; for which reason, I am of opinion, you will do more good to real Christianity, than all the preachers of the Socinian scheme, that ever went before you.

You have attempted to frame an excuse for the abstruse, ambiguous, and equivocal style in which the scriptures are written, according to your plan of doctrine, from the manners of the Orientals, whose speech abounds with bold and striking figures. But I think there can be no beauty in any figure which tends to obscure, and less still, in that which tends to invert a doctrine. The true beauty of figurative language, lies in its explicative quality; whereas, all those passages of scripture by you referred to, are darkened by figures ill-chosen and misapplied. If the scriptures have suffered so much through the manner of writing amongst the Orientals, as to embarrass rational gentlemen in their expositions of them; one would really wonder, how the *Koran* came to be so perspicuous, as to render it impossible for

the reader to be at a loss about the author's meaning, when speaking of the person of God, and of Christ, seeing he was an East countryman, as much an Oriental as any of the penmen of the sacred Scriptures.

He speaks very respectfully of Jesus, but then he always observes a consistency with himself, and with his leading design, "of restoring the worship of One God, in one person only." Never shall you find him addressing a mere man like himself after this manner, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness, is the sceptre of thy kingdom: thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. Thou Lord hast, in the beginning, laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou remainest; they all shall wax-old, as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail." From which address it is clear to a demonstration, that David himself either worshipped the Son, as the God and Maker of all things, and so was an idolater like the rest of the Trinitarians, or that he imposed upon mankind, by writing that for their learning, which, in reality, he did not believe himself.

But Mohammed is clearly on your side of

the question ; and as he fully believed Jesus Christ to be but a man, in all respects like himself, he judiciously guarded against every thing that might induce mankind to think more highly of the prophet of Nazareth. There is not one expression in the whole *Koran*, that in the least tends to confound the person of Jesus Christ with the Deity. Wherefore I conclude, that if your doctrine be true, Mohammed was a more intelligent and consistent prophet than David, and therefore the *Koran* is preferable to the book of *Psalms*.

I am, reverend Sir,

Yours, &c.

J. MACGOWAN.

LETTER XV.

Reverend Sir,

THE prophet next in eminence, as a penman of the scriptures, is that noble Isaiah, of whom so many encomiums have been given by Christian writers: but who, in my opinion, falls exceedingly short of the prophet Mohammed, in clearness of stile and strength of reasoning; on supposition that GOD never did, nor never could exist in Trinity, and that Jesus Christ is no more than a mere man like ourselves. The first passage of this prophecy, remarkable for its obscurity and ambiguity, is that *, Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call his name Immanuel," quoted by the evangelist Matthew †, and by you explained away as far as could well be done with convenience.

As you have brought the art of explaining, away, an adverse passage of scripture almost to a perfect system, I shall do myself the pleasure, for the public benefit, to transcribe some of your remarks in all their strength and beauty. "If we consider other instances of names imposed by the divine direction in the scriptures,

* Chap. vii. 14. † Chap. i. 23. ‡ Famil. Illust. p. 28.

we shall find, that they do not always express any thing characteristic of the person on whom they are imposed, but that they were intended to be a memorial of some divine promise or assurance, respecting things of a public and general concern.—The Divine Being, by appointing Christ to be called Immanuel, engaged to manifest his own presence with his people, by protecting and blessing them, and inflicting vengeance on their enemies and oppressors. For this prediction was given upon the occasion of an invasion by the Israelites and Syrians.”

I would not be guilty of denying, that this ingenious explanation has for ever disabled this prediction, from being of any use to the Christian system, being tied down precisely to a particular occasion and period: but at the same time it serves to shew the obscurity of the prophet, as very far inferior to Mohammed, in point of perspicuity; especially when we take the prediction in its connection with the circumstances attending its fulfilment. It is not easy to conceive, how the terrified Jews could be inspired with courage from being told, that, in about the space of 740 years afterwards, a young woman, a Virgin, should bear a Son, whose name should signify *God with us*; nor indeed how the future birth of this extraordinary Child, should prove the present destruction of those two smoking fire-brands, *Rezin* and *Pekah*, especially seeing this Child pro-

mised, when he should be born into the world, should be no more than a man like themselves.

Should we place this circumstance on a level with the naming of *Shear-Jashub*, as directed by you, and look on it as nothing out of the common way, it would only tend to perplex and bewilder us the more, and therefore demonstrate the obscurity of the prophet. “A Virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son whose name shall be called IMMANUEL, but who, notwithstanding, is not IMMANUEL, but a mere man like ourselves.” When this prediction came to be fulfilled, and the Virgin actually brought forth her Son, what wonderful phenomena appear? A new star, perhaps a new world is discovered by the eastern *Magi*, and the hosts of heaven descend to hymn the birth of the Son of Man. The equivocal name given by the prophet to the Virgin’s son, and the festivity of the hosts of paradise, on his being born into our world, naturally lead us to consider this child, *as extraordinary*, and something more than a man like ourselves. So that if your notion be true, there was a double snare laid, for the entanglement of Christians; the unmeaning, or at least unapplicable name, imposed upon him in prophecy; and the august manner in which he was introduced into the world. Could this latter be consistent with the wisdom of God? Had the former any likeness to the clear and nervous

manner of the prophet Mohammed? Surely not. For as I have before observed, he carefully guarded against every expression, that might produce a belief of Jesus Christ's being any more than a man like himself.

But the Trinitarians, or what is the same, Christian idolaters, have a very happy way of preserving the dignity of this prediction, in a perfect consistency with the whole volume of Revelation, in resting satisfied with that explanation given by Paul *, “ *God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of Angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.*” This does extremely well for the orthodox, but is wholly incompatible with your absurd scheme of doctrine.

We consider this apostolical declaration, as proclaiming the fulfilment of that prophecy, and believe that the Virgin's Son was none other, than God incarnated in our own proper nature. And indeed it will be worthy of your sagacity to shew, how God could be said to have been manifested in the flesh of Jesus, if he had indeed no personal Union with Deity; and at the same time how God manifested in the flesh, could be said to be received up into glory, if there was not a nature united to a divine person, which actually underwent that amazing change; or with what propriety blood could be ascribed to Deity, if flesh and

* 1. Tim. iii. 16.

blood had not stood, in personal relation thereunto? I plainly foresee, that, if we give up the doctrine of the TRINITY, and of CHRIST'S DIVINITY, we shall also be obliged to forgo the Bible itself, as the most incoherent, and absurd of all publications. Notwithstanding if taken in its connection with these blessed doctrines, it is perfectly beautiful; it is a glorious discovery of the mind and will, of all the persons in DEITY, and of all the perfections of JEHOVAH.

But I have not yet done with the sublime Isaiah, seeing that passage in this prophecy, chap. ix. 6. is still more obscure, and more adverse to Mohammedanism, and what you call rational Christianity "unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulders; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty GOD, the everlasting FATHER, the Prince of Peace." I must beg leave to observe upon this passage, that, if your explanation * be the Socinian sense of it, and if their

* In this, as in the former case, these titles may not express what Christ is, but what God will manifest himself to be in him, and by him; so that, in the dispensation of the gospel, God, the wise and benevolent author of it, will appear to be a wonderful counsellor, the everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace. If this name be supposed to characterize Christ himself, it will by no means favour the common doctrine of the Trinity; because it will make him to be the Father, or the first person, and not the Son, or the second person. Besides, whatever powers or dignities are to be possessed by Christ, it is sufficiently intimated in this place that he does

sense is the genuine mind of the HOLY GHOST, this prophet, who has been so justly admired for his elocution and sublimity, must sink into contempt: nay, be deemed worthy of the severest censure, as a blind leader of the people, one who has given occasion of the stumbling of millions.

If these titles given to Christ are not expressive of what he really is in himself, but what God will manifest himself to be through him; it must follow that the titles themselves, are not proper to Christ, but to God only; and consequently that God himself must, properly speaking, be that child born, and that son given; an absurdity never so much as thought on by the Trinitarians, idolatrous as you have represented them to be. They never supposed that the divine nature was changed into flesh and blood; but that this promised seed should be conceived in personal union with the word of God, who has an indubitable right to all the titles following, and so become the child born, and the son given, considered in this relation. They cannot see how their considering the Son of God, as the everlasting Father of his church, can have any unhappy influence on the doctrine of the Trinity as you alledge. But they very justly conclude, that not hold them independent, and underived; since he himself, and all the blessings that he bestows, are said to be given, that is, by God; and at the conclusion of the prophecy, in the next verse, it is said, that "the zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this." Famil. Illust. pages 29 & 30.

if to worship Jesus Christ, as the mighty God, is really idolatry, this prophet is very blameable for his manner of speaking, and justly deserves punishment, as an instrument of bringing on their inevitable ruin.

Had he been studious of the good of mankind, would he not have guarded them against idolatry? how easily might have he expressed himself, in some such manner as this? “Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, who is in all respects only a man like ourselves. He is not the wonderful Counsellor, nor the mighty God, nor the everlasting Father, having had no existence prior to his being born into the world; but by him, in the dispensation of the gospel, God the wise and benevolent Author of it, will appear to be a wonderful Counsellor, the everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace, for it is not the child born, but God the Father to whom these titles are applicable*.” This would have approached near to the clearness of stile used in the Turkish Koran. But to tell us that the Child born, the Son given should be called God with us, when in reality he meant no such thing, is absolute jesuitism; and if your doctrine should eventually prove true, I could never forgive Isaiah, this egregious blunder, so fatal in its influence, on the concerns of my immortal soul.

* This is Dr. Priestley's exposition. Fam. Illust. of the passage.

Shall we ever find the prophet of Arabia talking in such vague, and unmeaning, not to say ambiguous and equivocal terms? He speaks of a child born, but keeps clear of every appellation, which might lead men to worship Christ, as the mighty God, or the everlasting Father, or even to think him more than a man like themselves. From which it is clear to a demonstration, that if your doctrine be true, Mohammed was a much better prophet than Isaiah, and of course the Mohammedan, is preferable to the Christian religion.

But Sir, if the Child born, the Son given, has indeed a personal right to all the sublime appellations, given him by the prophet, what horrid blasphemy must it be, to treat him only as a man, in all respects like ourselves; a being, who had no existence till about seventeen hundred years ago? Think, Sir, how terrible the wrath of a blasphemed Redeemer must be, wherever it falls! Is not this the rock that shall grind them, upon whom it falls, to powder.

To return to my subject, and that, in the mouth of two or three witnesses the truth of my proposition may be established: Namely, if your doctrine, that Jesus Christ is but a man like ourselves, be true, Mohammed was more clear, more consistent than the prophet Isaiah; you will permit me to point out, the remarkable obscurity of his fortieth chapter.

First he prophesies in verse 3, of John the Baptist, Christ's forerunner, in these very remarkable words, "The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a path for our God." Again, addressing Zion in verses 10, 11, he says, "behold the Lord God will come, with a strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him; behold his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, shall gently lead those that are with young."

Here the person before whom the voice was to cry is expressly called Jehovah—Our God—and the Lord God. Yet this advent of the Lord God, is expressly applied to Jesus Christ, and John his forerunner in Mat. iii. and Luke iii. 4. And Jesus assumes the office and character of Shepherd, by the prophet ascribed to the Lord God, whose coming was promised, and before whom John was to prepare a way in the wilderness.

The following august description of this blessed Shepherd, who was to follow John, serves still to make the matter more difficult; as nobody could suppose the prophet describing a mere creature, who has not existed eighteen hundred years. "Who hath measured the waters in the hallow of his hand: and meted out heaven with a span, and compre-

hended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance, &c. &c." It would seem that the prophet had here exhausted the funds of eloquence, in order to set forth the greatness and grandeur of that Being who is the subject of his prophecy. But, if after all, he is no more than a mere creature, this must argue an entire want of judgment in the writer, or an impious design to lead us into idolatry, by worshipping Jesus Christ as the God of Zion. And yet if this was the prophet's design, the Lord Jesus actually connives at it, and even confirms it by applying his words to himself, Rev. xxii. 12.

But what renders the prophecy still more ambiguous and obscure, is the cry which this voice was sent to publish, "all flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof, as the flower of the field. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the word of our God shall stand for ever."—One would suppose that his leading design, in this passage, was to caution people against the folly of trusting in a Saviour, who is but a mere man like ourselves, seeing that all flesh is grass, and the most goodly humanity, abstractly considered, is but as the flower of the field—therefore that none may warrantably trust in any, who has not a per-

sonal claim to that divine character, the word of the Lord or our God.

Surely no man but a rational Dissenter could suppose, that all this magnificence of stile was used, merely, to set forth a man in all respects like ourselves; a man who has not any, the most distant title to personal Deity. No wonder therefore if Christians were so early seduced into idolatry, and that the well-instructed Disciples of Mohammed, have continued so stedfast in the faith, that Jesus Christ is but a man like themselves, and that there is One God, in One person only, and that Mohammed is his prophet. I would therefore, for my own part when I come to change my sentiments, much rather embrace the religion of the Turks respecting its fundamental doctrine, than that of the rational Dissenters, or the sentiments of the Socinians.

I am, reverend Sir,

Yours, &c.

J. MACGOWAN.

LETTER XVI.

Reverend Sir,

WHAT has been said in the former letters, may serve as a specimen of the confused language of prophecy, on supposition that your doctrine is true. I might add many more instances of equal ambiguity, but shall proceed to shew, that if Jesus Christ be not the adorable God--man, he must have borne the most sacrilegious character, that ever existed, and, must of necessity have been the greatest of all impostors; which is a thought so tremendous, that I scarcely know how to express it. But I trust, the character of my only Redeemer shall stand for ever unimpeached, whatever should become of Mohammedans, or Socinians, or even of the Trinitarians themselves. Yet this shocking consequence naturally results from rational religion, as it is very falsely called.

In prosecuting this affecting subject, I shall shew, that, if Jesus Christ is but a man in all respects like ourselves, he has most certainly robbed the Almighty of his glory, both in the manner in which he wrought his miracles—and in his application of old testament oracles

to himself, though they could not possibly be applicable to any person, who is not truly and properly God.

The manner of working his miracles shall be the object of my present attention, and I hope you will honour my remarks upon it with yours in the most serious manner. I do not mean to solicit your public notice. No, Sir; perhaps you do not choose to reply to an ignoble correspondent. All I mean is to request your candid perusal in private, seeing I have no pretensions to nobility.

The matter will begin with Mat. viii. 3, 4. "And behold there came a Leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt thou canst make me clean." I lay no stress at all on the word worshipped, it might, for any thing I know, intend no more, "than a fine scrape and bow," but what I principally remark is, the manner of this same Leper's address. Lord, if thou wilt, &c. He does not say "if God will," thou canst make me clean.—Not; if God will he can give thee power to make me clean. What thoughts soever the Pharisees might have of Jesus, as but a man like themselves, it is very plain, that this poor Leper considered him as the Lord of diseases, who, could say to this, go and it goeth, and to that, come and it cometh, or he would certainly have addressed him in a different manner.

What is more remarkable still, our Lord

really encourages his error, and confirms his idolatrous belief, by answering the supplicant in his own form of speech, "I will be thou clean." Who was he, that should take upon him to make people clean, if he was but a man like ourselves? Of all the men like ourselves, whom God ever raised up as prophets, we read but of one who attempted a miracle in his own name, and he severely smarted for his presumption.* I mean Moses the man,

* If, to blunt, the edge of this reasoning, it be replied, Elisha wrought many miracles without referring to any power higher than that which dwelt in himself, notwithstanding all were wrought by the power of the most high God: such as increasing the widow's oil, giving a child to the Shunamite, sending a messenger to Naaman, directing him to go and wash, in Jordan, &c. it will be farther answered. To do justice to a personal character, we ought carefully to attend to every part of his particular history, and not pick out detached pieces, to the injury of the whole. If the history of Elisha is closely examined, and taken in its proper connection, it will appear, that God only was glorified in those miracles by him performed.

His entrance upon the prophetic office, was evidently a display of Divine power, by which alone a double portion of the spirit of Elijah rested upon his servant Elisha. He had not power to cross the river Jordan, till he invoked the Lord God of his master, by whose power he divided the mighty waters. This, were there no more instances on record, is sufficient to shew, that all his subsequent works were wrought by the same ineffable power of Deity, and consequently in the same name by which he began to work his miracles. But he gave a Son to the Shunamite, on which occasion we are not told that he called on the name of the Lord, and therefore this instance is in some measure parallel with Christ's working of miracles without calling upon the name of God.

He did give the Shunamite, a Son, but it does not appear, that he called not on the name of God on the occasion; but

the friend of God, who, instead of sanctifying the name of the Lord at the waters of Strife, struck the rock in his own name, saying, "ye rebels, shall we bring water out of the rock for you?" The waters indeed followed the stroke, because God would support the honour of his prophet, even when he sinned; and took another method of punishing his rashness,

if he did, the very history of that Child, sheweth that he wrought not this miracle without a Divine power supernaturally made manifest. Take the history together, and let the latter part explain the former; as it cannot be supposed that Elisha had less power to work miracles at the latter end, than at the beginning; and we shall see that he did not do even this without an appeal to the divine name.

The Shunamite visited him at mount Carmel, 2 Kings, ch. iv. He saw the anguish of her soul, but he could not guess at the cause, because the Lord had hid it from him, till the woman disclosed the fatal event. Which done, he sent Gehazi, his servant, with very positive instructions for his procedure, in raising the child to life; but all in vain, for "there was neither voice nor hearing, and the child did not awake." When he himself arrived, he went up and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon the child's mouth, his eyes upon the child's eyes, his hands upon the child's hands, and he stretched himself upon the child, and his flesh waxed warm. Now all this was accompanied with prayer to God, that the child's spirit might return to him again. From hence it is plain, the prophet wrought his miracles in such a manner as that God should have the honour of them all. But Jesus wrought his, so as the glory arising from them redounded to himself, and seldom mentioned the name of the Father in them. How different was the prophet's conduct from Christ's when he raised the widow's son of Nain, by only saying, "Young man, I say unto thee, *arise*." Whereas Elijah, or Elisha, would in such a case have prayed unto the LORD, and said, O LORD, MY GOD, I pray thee, let this young man's soul come into him again. 1 Kings xvii. 12.

namely, by shutting him out of the earthly Canaan.

Jesus refers to none greater than himself, but expressly says, "I WILL," not my Father willeth, or by the permission of God, be thou clean; and immediately his leprosy departed from him. Not only so, but he goes on in an uninterrupted succession of marvellous cures, without once mentioning the name of the Father, yet is acknowledged by an audible voice from Heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him." Does not this lead us to suppose, that the Father approved of his working miracles in his own name? Especially, when it is considered that the Apostles did not work any miracles at all in the name of the Father, but in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Certainly GOD would not thus have given his glory to another, if indeed he had been another, seeing he had so peremptorily declared the contrary. And surely the glory of working miracles in his own name is proper only to Deity. Therefore, GOD must either have given this glory to CHRIST, who was another; or CHRIST must have usurped it; otherwise he must absolutely be the true and eternal GOD, I mean in the Unity of the DIVINE ESSENCE.

Now if he was but a man like ourselves, there was something inhumane, as well as impious, in the manner in which Christ sent

the Leper away, as from what had passed, he must needs go away under a delusion; firmly believing, that, the man JESUS had performed this cure, by his own personal power and authority; which, according to your notions, must have been *downright idolatry*. So that the very cure he had obtained, might, from the manner of it, have become the occasion of his perdition, by leading him to honour the SON, as much as he honoured the FATHER.

This is the true conduct of Jesus according to your plan of doctrine. But it is as distant from the Heavenly, and compassionate conduct of the Redeemer whom I adore, as light is from darkness, or Heaven from hell. Our Jesus being the blessed Immanuel, had a right to assume every divine honour, and could not be charged with robbing GOD, though he actually made himself equal with the Father. But your Jesus, being only a man like yourselves, may very justly be charged with sacrilegious robbery, on applying to himself any of the prerogatives of GOD the Father.

The instance of healing the Centurion's servant is equally remarkable for the strange and unaccountable manner in which it was performed. "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof;" why not, if he was but a man like himself; "But speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed," what, by the word of one who is but a

man like ourselves? "I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me, and I say unto this go, and he goeth; and to another come, and he cometh; and to my servant do this, and he doth it," plainly intimating that he considered Jesus as having the same power over diseases, as he himself had over his soldiers. At the word of command to call them, or to send them away; and in this, lay the greatness of his faith, so justly celebrated by the Heavenly prophet. Yet Jesus was so far from attempting to convince him of his error, that he even confirms him in it; by applauding his faith, and then granting his request, without any reference made to an influence superior to his own volition. Certainly if Jesus was but a mere man, possessed only of a delegated power, acting in every respect in a subordinate capacity, he was culpable in not calling upon that superior name, in which he performed all his operations. His disciples, how absurd soever in other respects, maintained a consistency in this part of their character; for although they wrought many miracles, they did none but in the name of JESUS OF NAZARETH. In this, they did not ascribe to the power of the Father only, the miracles which they wrought, but to his holy child Jesus: and they did not, like him, leave room to suppose, that they performed miracles by their own personal authority. Mohammed would have told the

people in such a case, that he wrought, only *by the permission of God*; as he indeed tells us was the case with Jesus; which also seems to be the sense of the virtuous Socinian doctors.

The same chapter furnisheth us with three other instances of his miraculous power; in healing Peter's wife's mother of a fever—rebuking the wind and sea, as if he had been their Maker and Governor—casting legions of devils out of the demoniac, and permitting them to enter into the herd of swine. We may well say, what manner of man is this, the touch of whose hand makes the Leper clean, and banishes the most malignant fever? Who at pleasure controls the boisterous wind, and calms the tempestuous ocean. But when we follow the thread of the story a little farther, we must be shocked with horror, at hearing him give permission to devils, to drown and destroy the swine belonging to the neighbouring farmers. Might we not well ask him, as the Jews did on another occasion, “by what authority dost thou these things?”

You say, Sir, that Jesus was commissioned by God. But have you duly considered the propriety of your assertion? Can it ever be, that God should give a commission to him to destroy the peoples cattle without some cause on their own part? Or do you think, that drowning the swine was the readiest way to convince them of the truth of his doctrine?

But every difficulty vanisheth, when we consider him as the blessed God-man, whose are the cattle on a thousand hills? and reflect, that those Gergesenes carried on an illicit traffic with the Gentile nations. Breeding swine for the use of the Heathens, though forbidden their own use by the national law; wherein swine's flesh was held an abomination. I say, when these things are considered, every part of the Redeemer's conduct is not only justifiable, but perfectly consistent with his legislative rectitude and authority: but he could never be justified, on supposition, that he was but a mere man, in all respects like ourselves. Neither would it give us a favourable idea of the benevolence of his disposition, nor even of his moral rectitude and virtue.

The account we have Mat. ix. Mark v. and Luke viii. of his healing the woman with the bloody issue, exhibits something very dark and perplexing; as it manifestly appears upon the face of the text, that Jesus considered himself, and the evangelist also considered him as the source of the miracle, exclusive of all superior influence. Mark says, that Jesus knowing in himself that virtue was *gone out of him*, turned about, &c. whereas he ought to have said, that virtue was gone out from God, by him as the instrument, according to you. But what must astonish every rational Christian, is, Jesus himself confirms the evangelist's testimony, Luke viii. 45. *Jesus*

said somebody hath touched me: for VIRTUE IS GONE OUT OF ME." Now if he wrought no miracles, but by the permission of the Father, as Mohammed says, or performed all his works by the power of the Father, as you would have us to believe, was he not shamefully wanting in zeal for God, to talk in this strain, "virtue is gone out of ME?" What virtue, I pray you, should go out of one, who is in all respects but a man like ourselves? If there is but One God, in One Person, the Father only, and if Jesus Christ was a teacher sent from him: was it not his business, to lead the people to the Father only, instead of leading them to himself? But instead of that, he works miracles, and does not so much as mention the name of the Father in them; yea even tells the people, that the virtue by which those miracles were effected, came entirely out of himself, as its source. Indeed, Sir, it will be very difficult to clear the character of Jesus from the charge, of *robbing the Deity*, on supposition, that he is no more than a man like ourselves.

To keep clear of every dead flie which might spoil our ointment, I would observe that, I am aware, you will alledge in Christ's defence, that he made a general profession upon more occasion than one, of subordinacy to the Father, and of his shewing good works from the Father, as John x. 32. But then it will be answered, why did he not upon all occasions,

on which he exerted a miraculous power bear this testimony, that the people might not be misled into a wrong notion of his person and authority? The Leper, the Centurion, the woman with the bloody issue, were sent away without any such information, or any caution against believing in him as the source of healing. Consequently this very profession serves, only to embarrass his character the more; Leads us to consider his conduct in the following light. He knew all along, that he wrought no works but by the power of the Father; and on particular occasions openly confesses it: yet the far greater part of his works were performed without any visible reference had to the Father: and the subjects upon whom he exercised his miraculous power, were, for the most part left to conclude, that they were cured merely by the personal authority of the immediate operator; whereas a few words fitly spoken by him would have convinced them of the contrary. So that this, instead of clearing him from the charge of robbing the Deity, only serves to confirm it.

But every cloud disperseth, every difficulty vanisheth, when we consider him as, according to the scriptures, acting in a twofold capacity becoming his name Immanuel. As Man, and Mediator, acting in subordinacy to, and by the authority of the Father: and as a divine person dwelling in the flesh, as one with the Father, acting in his own name, and by

his own personal authority. And I think, without considering him in this light, it is morally impossible to clear him from the charge of duplicity, and of prophanely robbing the Deity.

I am,

REVEREND SIR,

YOURS, &c.

J. MACGOWAN.

LETTER XVII.

Reverend Sir,

It is now time to come to Christ's application of Old Testament prophecies to himself, and to treat of his usual manner, of confounding himself with Deity, in which, it shall be left to you to determine, whether such conduct can be justified by the laws of piety, or even by those of sober intelligence, on supposition always, that your plan of doctrine be genuine gospel. You seem to be apprehensive of some difficulty, arising from this consideration, from the great pains you have taken in your familiar illustration, to explain away some of those passages of scripture, which bear hardest upon your irrational scheme. This, Sir, demonstrates the obscurity of the scriptures, and may in some measure assist me, in my determination, whether the religion of Jesus, according to your plan of doctrine, or the Mohammedan religion shall be adopted.

Searching the hearts of the children of men is claimed by the most high as his own prerogative, Jer. xvii. 10. "I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins." This has been ascribed to him by his church in all ages, as might be

shewn in numberless instances. And would we not from hence be led to suppose, that none besides the most high God, could pretend to search the heart, and try the reins of the sons of men. Indeed the scriptures of the Old Testament give all possible encouragement to this notion; for Solomon, in his prayer at the consecration of the temple, 2. Chron. vi. 30. says, “thou only knowest the hearts of the children of men.” If I am not mistaken, that which is peculiar to God only, as searching the heart, is here said to be, must in its own nature be incommunicable: for were it communicable to a creature, it could not be peculiar to God *himself*. Were it possible that God should communicate the power and prerogative of searching the heart, and trying the reins of the sons of men, to a mere creature, even to a man like ourselves, as you alledge, it could with no propriety be said of him, that *he only* searcheth the heart; seeing, another besides him, actually knoweth the heart, and searcheth the reins of the children men.

A teacher sent from God, must necessarily be considered, as one that knows the Divine mind, especially in every thing relative to his own personal mission; one that will, on all occasions, preserve the most awful distance between himself and his Maker; for this seems to be essential to true piety, which, you know, cannot be separated from the character of a

good man. We cannot therefore suppose, that Jesus was ignorant of Solomon's confession of the most high God, as the only searcher of hearts. His professed design in coming into the world was to fulfil the law and the prophets, not to destroy their testimony. We cannot therefore but wonder, he should suffer his evangelists to ascribe that perfection to himself, in flat contradiction to the testimony borne by Solomon. I say contradiction, on supposition that your doctrine were true. They tell us, that Jesus saw the thoughts of the Jewish cavillers: that he needed not that any should testify of man, because he knew what was in man. Surely this was to all intents and purposes confounding him with that God, *who only knoweth the hearts of the children of men.*

But what must we think, when we find Jesus Christ applying Solomon's confession to himself in person? He gives us all possible reason to believe, that he is essentially that very being whom Solomon address'd on that occasion. Devout Solomon says, "thou only knowest the hearts of the children of men." Jesus replies, *Rev. ii. 23.* "I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts," He even seems to wish this declaration to be published abroad by his heralds as the true doctrine of the gospel; for he says, "and all the churches shall know, that I am he that searcheth the reins and hearts." If therefore but a mere

man like ourselves, he was guilty of the highest presumption, and took the most likely way possible to lead us into idolatry. For so long as we believe him to be the searcher of hearts, and trier of the reins of men, we are under an unavoidable necessity of worshipping him, with the same divine honours which we ascribe to the Father. And should we be damned for so doing, must not our ruin be laid to his charge, who, by ascribing divine honours to himself, instead of maintaining that lowly distance becoming a creature, has been the occasion of it?

I do not wonder, that people of your persuasion are so much offended with the revelation of John the divine, as to wish it cut off from the sacred Canon, it is so extremely adverse to your scheme of irrational religion; which, if the scriptures be true, must be the absurdest system of enthusiasm, to be met with amongst modern *Fanatics*. One caution, however, I would beg leave to give those Enthusiasts, who are so zealous to get rid of this part of holy scripture; and that is, well to consider a certain passage in it, Rev. xxii. 18, 19. "For I testify unto every man, that heareth the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the

holy city, and the things which are written in this book." If there is but a bare possibility of the Revelation being divinely given, and if its sacred contents are guarded in such a manner, that even to add to, or diminish from them shall be punished with the severest penalty, will it not be very dangerous to attempt expunging of the whole?

After all, if it should appear at his second coming, that our Jesus is none other than the ancient of days, God over all, blessed for evermore incarnated in the flesh, what a plight must they be in, who are now mad with enthusiastic zeal, against the doctrine of his proper Deity, as One with the Father and the Holy Ghost? These things certainly merit our most serious consideration, as our God is not to be trifled with.

Was this the only instance of his applying to himself those parts of Old Testament prophecy, which undoubtedly have the supreme God for their object, it might be passed over as a peculiar instance, in which it is supposed, the sacred penman was mistaken. But we find it to be his constant practice, as well as that of his apostles, and must therefore conclude, that either your doctrine is blasphemous enthusiasm, or he himself an arrant impostor: as there does not to me appear to be any medium.

That in Isaiah lxi. is evidently referable only to the supreme God, from what is said in verse

8. “*For I the Lord love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt offering, and I will direct their work in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.*” If the speaker can at all be known by his stile, surely Jehovah is the speaker here; yet the same august person condescends to an humbler, even a subordinate capacity, and in the beginning of the chapter speaks of himself in the station of a servant, and sets forth the divinity of his mission as such. “The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he hath anointed me,” &c. Here then is a servant, who calls himself Jehovah, and speaks, as if he were the supreme GOD, and Lawgiver to his people. Yet JESUS, who, you say, is but a man like ourselves, in Luke iv. applies the whole of this to himself: for, after quoting this passage from Isaiah, he said, “This day is the scripture fulfilled in your eyes.” By which he must mean to persuade his audience, that he himself was the identical person there speaking in the spirit of prophecy.

The person whom the prophet represented, assumes the name and character of the Lord, or Jehovah; by which name GOD only is known in Jacob: but Jesus in effect tells the people that he was that person, “this day is this scripture fulfilled in your eyes.” I hate robbery, says he in the prophecy, but the contrary appears in the application of it to himself, on supposition that he is but a mere man

like ourselves. “I love judgment;” but how does this appear, if he assumes divine titles, and prerogatives, when in reality he is not a divine person? “And I will make an everlasting covenant with them;” from whence one would, at first view, be apt to conceive him to be an everlasting Being; or how should his covenant stand? Moreover that he had an essential personal right to make a covenant with his people.

What should we think is the design of a mere man, if we heard him ascribing to himself the titles of the supreme GOD, and, at the same time, avowing himself to be the faithful and true witness? Must we not consider him as an impostor, and his doctrine worthy to be treated with the greatest contempt? It will be in vain to alledge in his excuse, that the divinity of his mission warranted his assumption of those appellations, seeing such warrants, and such practices resulting from them, are wholly unknown among men. The commission of a prince will authorise his ambassador, to speak in the name of his master, but will never warrant his assuming his master's name, and titles of honour. How would their high mightinesses, the States of Holland look upon *Sir Joseph York*, were he to say to them, “I am King George III. defender of the faith, &c.” Would they not conclude, that he was either a traitor, or a madman? If he speaks only in the name of his master, they

may understand his address; but if he should say, I and King George are one: or he that hath seen me hath seen King George, they would certainly be at a loss to guess his meaning. Even so, if Jesus had barely said, "the Lord loveth judgment, &c." the people might have known his meaning. But when he says, "I Jehovah love judgment, and hate robbery, &c." No man can think that he means to represent himself, as no more than a mere creature. So that at all events, if to worship him as God in our nature be idolatry, he himself has given occasion to our error, therefore deserves the whole blame of our destruction, if we should indeed be damned for believing in him as such. These considerations make greatly for the prophet Mohammed, who never confounded himself with Deity; never professed himself to be more than a mere man, inspired not by the Holy Ghost, but by the angel Gabriel; consequently that his religion is rather to be chosen, than the enthusiasm of Socinians and rational Dissenters.

But the answer which Jesus gave to John's disciples, when sent to him with a very peremptory message, demanding a categorical answer, will further tend to prove our position, and to give the ascendancy to Mohammed the prophet, as in all respects more tender of the divine character and perfections. Mat. xi. 3, 4, 5, 6. *Art thou he that should come,*

or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see; the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.

This answer was, in effect the same, as if he had said, “go your way and tell John, that you have seen the xxxvth chap. of Isaiah fulfilled in my ministry;” for this answer is nothing short of a clear declaration, of the fulfilment of that prediction, verses 4, 5, 6. Behold your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence, he will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing, &c. So says the prophet. And Jesus says, go ye and tell John, that all these things are come to pass. Now as it was never expected, that these things should come to pass, till God came with vengeance, and our God with a recompence to save us: must not the answer given by Jesus, naturally lead John and his Disciples to conclude, that their God was actually thus come, seeing every sign of his coming was made manifest?

Here is no care taken either by the prophet, or by Jesus himself, to guard the people against

paying supreme honour to that person, in whom such mighty works did shew forth themselves. But on the contrary, they both concur, in giving us room to believe, that he was none other than God manifested in the flesh. Wherefore if it be idolatry to worship Jesus Christ, with the same worship which we pay to the Father, the blame lies not with us, but with himself, and the penmen of the scriptures. That he even intended to be considered as God in the human nature, is apparent from the conclusion of his answer, “and blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.”

It was not opening of blind eyes, unstopping of deaf ears, &c. which were a stumbling to the Jews: but the grand offence was, “he being a man made himself God.” And surely they were in the right, seeing no man could possibly have understood him, to intend otherwise, without plainly inverting his language. Had he bid John’s disciples to tell their master what they saw, and at the same time to caution him against considering him as a Divine Person, there would have been a propriety in his conduct, and he had not been necessary to the idolatry of his disciples, which idolatry shall be the subject of my next.

Mean while I would observe, that if there really are three, that bear record in heaven, the FATHER, the WORD, and the HOLY GHOST; and if Jesus Christ is none other than

the divine Word made flesh, and who dwelt among us; then his conduct is perfectly consistent; he stands acquitted of sacrilegiously robbing the Almighty, which he never can be, if your doctrine be true. I do not pretend to say, whether John's testimony be an interpolation or not, as I never saw the identical copy, that may be called the original, I mean that which was in the apostles hand-writing. And this I deem necessary, before I shall believe those enthusiasts who affirm, its not having been in the original. I verily think none but an enthusiast, will be daring enough to make this assertion, without having previously examined that identical original copy. Therefore from your bold affirmation of its being interpolated, I should suppose, that you have been favoured with that privilege.

Once more we must repeat our observation, in favour of Mohammed, that in no place of his Koran, does he assume any divine title, or make use of language calculated to make his followers consider him, as any other than a man, whom God had honoured as a reformer of religion. Never once in any sense confounds himself with God, having the most perfect abhorrence of that idolatry, which exalts a creature to an equality with God the Father. I conclude therefore, that if Jesus Christ be but a mere man like ourselves; one who has no personal title to divine worship, we had better at once reject the Bible, as an abstruse book,

stuffed with incoherence, ambiguity, and equivocation; and receive the Koran, as the mind of God, a book which sets the doctrine of God and Christ in a more consistent, clear, and intelligible point of view, if your religion be indeed the truly Christian system.

I am, reverend Sir,

Yours, &c.

J. MACGOWAN.

LETTER XVIII.

Reverend Sir,

HAVING in my last shewn, that if your doctrine be true, Jesus Christ must have been one of the most unintelligible, not to say the most dangerous, of all preachers; I shall attempt in this, farther to demonstrate the proposition, by shewing the unhappy influence which his doctrine produced upon his immediate followers, who were to all intents and purposes as erroneous as the rest of the Trinitarians. I am the more encouraged to this, from the visible difficulty which even your adventurous pen laboured under, in endeavouring to find out their meaning, which nevertheless, to this hour, lies as deeply concealed as ever.

Although I am like yourself; one of those distinguished geniuses who love to strike out from the beaten path, as we have both abundantly shewn in former lucubrations; I shall find myself now under a necessity of following you from page to page, and from sentence to sentence, after the manner of polemic writers, or as Achilles followed the Trojan hero round the walls of the city.

You, Sir, with all your high intelligence, seem to be aware of the difficulty of explaining many passages of the apostolic writings, and are therefore obliged to substitute a bold assertion, in place of a rational interpretation, a method generally adopted by all enthusiasts. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, styles him (Christ) say you, “the author and finisher of faith. Which title is attributed to Jesus, with respect to the state of glory and universal dominion, to which he is exalted by the Father*.” It may be so, Doctor. But certainly, it is in the highest degree improper. Either Jesus is not, or he is the author and finisher of faith. If he is not, we should not expect to hear him declared such, by the spirit of truth. If he is the author of faith, it will follow, that he is God as well as Man: seeing faith is in every sense, not only the gift of God, but of his operation. Now if faith is the gift of God, and of his operation, how absurd is it to assert, that Jesus Christ is the Author and Finisher of faith: seeing he is but “a man in all respects like ourselves?” Or, to gratify curiosity a little, take the argument in the following order; if faith is only by the gift and operation of God, and if Jesus Christ be really its author and finisher, how, in the name of common sense, is it possible, that he should be *no more than a man like ourselves?*

It is not clear to every rational reader, that if the apostles, in one passage of their writ-

ings, tell us, that faith is the gift of God ; of the operation of God, &c. and in another, ascribe faith to Jesus as its author and finisher ; their intent is, if they knew their own meaning, to make us believe, that Jesus Christ actually is God over all, blessed for evermore.

But enthusiasts and bigots to party opinions, will swallow any absurdity without attempting to digest it. If the apostles were then divinely inspired, and really knew their own meaning, will not this instance, from their writings, in some measure justify our worship of Jesus, in union with the Father and the Holy Ghost, as the true God and eternal life? If they knew not their own meaning, they were very unfit persons for being the founders of the Christian Religion.

Take a view of the matter according to your notions, Sir, and then judge of its propriety. Faith is the gift of God, and of the operation of God ; Jesus is the author and finisher of faith, and yet he is no more God than we ourselves are. Or thus, “ Jesus is the author and finisher of faith ; yet is not faith either of his operation or his gift.” What man of sound understanding, would not wish to keep clear of a system of enthusiasm so big with absurdity, even when it imposeth itself upon mankind, as rational religion? It puts me in mind of the Ass in masquerade in the fable. The lion’s skin could not conceal the imposition. But to dismiss this passage I

must say, that if the apostles knew Jesus Christ to be no more than a man like ourselves, they were exceedingly blameable for expressing themselves in language so obscure and equivocal, no such instance of ambiguity being found with the prophet of Arabia, when speaking of God, or of Christ Jesus.

Your long quotation from the book of the Revelation, will very little mend the matter, seeing it implies an unjust insinuation, as if the Trinitarians denied Jesus to sustain any subordinate character. On the contrary, it has been their constant practice to set him forth as Man and Mediator, as acting in all respects in subordination to the Father. But they distinguish between his divine person, abstracted from his humanity, as existing in the Unity of the Godhead; and his human nature as existing in Union with that Divine person. They can therefore perfectly, and in the most rational manner, reconcile his supremacy as God-man with his subordinacy, as man and Mediator: whilst enthusiasts of every name confound themselves, by denying the one or the other of these characters, so essential to the person of our Redeemer. I sincerely wish, that our modern pretenders to superior reason, were favoured with a larger measure of common sense.

But notwithstanding this subordinacy, as you observe, he says (and the saying must be very strange indeed) I am the *Alpha* and *Omega*,

the beginning and the ending, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the ALMIGHTY. You say, indeed, “that these high titles are attributed to Jesus.” But nothing can be plainer, Sir, than that he attributes them to himself, which still must add to the difficulty. That Jesus is a teacher sent from God, to teach the worship of the Father only, and yet declares of himself, that he is the *Alpha* and *Omega*, the beginning and the ending, which was, and which is to come, the *Almighty*; is a consideration that must puzzle every person of common understanding, who has not attained the address of leaping over the plainest testimony. Consequently, Sir, it makes greatly for the point I have in view, namely, to shew the obscureness and ambiguity of scripture language, on supposition, that the Socinian scheme is the true gospel of God our Saviour.

To soften that stubborn word, Almighty, you have critically observed, that it signifies Ruler over all. A notable discovery, indeed! a discovery becoming a comprehensive genius; especially when it is considered, that to be ruler over all, requires a person to be *mighty over all*. For if he is not mighty over all, how should he be *ruler over all*? How can it be supposed, that he can rule those beings over whom he has no power? And if he is mighty over all; after all this circumlocution, the word reverts to it usually accepted sense,

where I shall for the present leave it, and observe, that if he is mighty over all in any sense, in that same sense, there is none mighty over him; or to use your own phrase. If he is ruler over all, it would seem, that there is none who rules over him, in that sense in which he is said to be Ruler. After all, I think, in your exculpation of Jesus from the charge of ambition, and of robbing the Deity, you might have found a more happy interpretation of the word ALMIGHTY, than that of ruler over all. That, you know, is proper only to the great God; and your ascribing it to the little *God Jesus Christ* *, tends to confirm us in our idolatry.

But supposing we could, by the depth of reason, make it appear, that the word ALMIGHTY means no more, than the sounding word candour does with rational Dissenters, that is, nothing at all; we shall still find ourselves woefully perplexed by the other parts of the Redeemer's claim.

Admitting that you could take his omnipotence from him, what will you make of his being the beginning and the ending, which was, and which is to come? Which was. How long? Since the beginning of the Gospel.—Who told you so? Why are not the

* Great God—A phrase familiar to the lips of Arians and Socinians, who, if they mean any thing at all by it, and allow Jesus Christ in any sense nominally, or by vocation, or otherwise to be God, must necessarily account him to be but the little God.

words " of the Gospel," inserted in the text? If the beginning is mentioned without any expletive, are we not under a necessity of understanding thereby, the beginning of Being or Existence; or, as it is otherwise expressed, the beginning of the creation of God? Which was since his Being set up. This was from everlasting. Therefore I cannot say, though you can, when Jesus began to exist; because, in my view, he either existed from everlasting, or he does not now exist as the Saviour of sinners. There was, indeed, a man called Jesus, appeared about 1740 years ago, who made great pretensions to a divine mission. But what is that to me? I am not obliged to believe every one who comes with such pretensions. Besides, if he is not truly and properly God, I have much better reason to believe in Mohammed than in him; seeing Mohammed never encroached upon the province of the Almighty, never assumed names which might not be given to a mere man like ourselves. I never can, therefore, commit the keeping of my soul, and its everlasting concerns, into the hands of one, the beginning of whose existence is uncertain; consequently the Jesus you talk of can be no Saviour for me. This leads me to take notice of the wisdom of the rationals, who knowing that they have only a poor impotent man for their Saviour, take care not to overload him, therefore take it upon themselves to finish transgression,

and make an end of sin; to propitiate the Deity, and work out their own salvation, under his common influences or assistance.

But, Sir, if Jesus be what I with my whole heart believe he is; he had a just, a personal right, to every part of this assumption. And to tell you the truth, if he is not the blessed Immanuel God manifested in our nature, I would as soon believe in Dr. Priestley, or the pope of Rome, or Mohammed as the saviour of mankind, as in him. This, Sir, I give you leave to publish at large, as the sentiments of the absurd Sh—r, and if you please, for this you may write me down Heretic.

To return now to my subject after so long a wander, a thing which, you know from former correspondence, I am in some measure subject unto; give me leave to note that quotation of yours from Heb. i. 6*. “*When God bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith let all the angels of God worship him.*” The use of the word worship in other passages, and on other occasions, is not the object of my present enquiry, but the certainty of its ambiguity, according to your sense of it. As to the Jews having no expectation of any other person than a man for their Messiah, as you say they had, will admit of a doubt, seeing Dr. Watts, in his glory of Christ as God-man, has clearly shewed the contrary. Nor is the remark concerning Abraham’s

* Famil. Illust. 27.

worshipping of the angels altogether to the purpose, seeing whatever he might think of Two of them, it is clear, that to the Third, he paid supreme adoration, and intreated him as the most high God.

If Paul had said, let all the angels of God honour him as a man whom God hath sent, we should have comprehended his meaning, and steered clear of that Christian idolatry into which we have fallen. But to be told, that all the angels of God must worship him, yet we ourselves must not pay him divine adoration, tends to perplex us with uncertainty. But this passage is clogged with another absurdity, namely, ascribing the name *first begotten* to Jesus Christ, as if he had been the first born of every creature, and had an actual existence prior to his incarnation; which you are pleased to deny. So then the matter may be thus stated. Jesus is the first begotten, yet he was not begotten till four thousand years after millions of millions of angels and men were created, and is not now 1800 years of age; whereas Adam is much above 5000. The angels of God must worship him, and yet they must not worship him. All men must honour the Son even as they honour the Father; and yet if any man ascribe the same honour to the Son which is due to the Father, he shall be deemed an Idolater. Can that, Sir, be Scripture, the word of the living God, which is big with such uncertainty? Thus

beclouded with obscurity, that seventeen hundred years are now elapsed, and its meaning is still doubtful? Still a doubt, whether Christ is to be worshipped as God, or honoured only as a good man and a martyr.

From these remarks it is pretty clear, that your superior reason is an *ignis fatuus*, which bewilders you, and leads you into difficulties inextricable; whilst a consistent Trinitarian, with all his supposed absurdity, preserves the scriptures of truth in their native harmony, beauty, and glory, as the word of that God, who is of one mind for ever and ever. I scruple not therefore to assert, and it is not difficult to prove, that consistent Trinitarians are the truly rational Christians; and that the Socinians themselves are the absurd enthusiasts of our generation. But more of this in my concluding Letter. I shall trouble you with nothing farther this post, than a remark or two on that passage, Col. ii. 9. In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. The propriety of which seems to have struck you so agreeably, if your words be indeed expressive of your meaning*.

“ This is a very proper expression, being strictly and literally true, though Christ himself was a mere man, since the wisdom and power of the One true God, the Father, were manifested in, and acted by him.”

So then, Doctor, you will go on to deal in

* Fam. Illust. 22.

mysteries, after all the salutary instructions you have received from so many different quarters. “A very proper expression; strictly and literally true,” you say. I am absolutely of the contrary opinion, and consider it as a very absurd and improper expression; strictly and literally false, on supposition that he is but a mere man like ourselves.

Pray, Sir, who is that Jesus you talk about so much, as upon a level with yourself, and who notwithstanding is the only person of whom it was ever said, “In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily?” Some people would think, that here you pay a very uncommon compliment to yourself. From which, indeed, it may be inferred, that you suppose the whole fulness of the Godhead to dwell bodily in you? As we must be under a kind of necessity of coming to this conclusion upon the premises. “In Christ,” says Paul, dwelleth the whole fulness of the Godhead bodily.” “Christ is in all respects but a man like ourselves,” says Dr. Priestley. Then must it not be concluded, that the fulness of the Godhead does actually dwell bodily in us as well as in him? O James Nailor! I lament the hole which the burning iron made in thy tongue, for thy supposed blasphemy, seeing the most rational gentleman of this enlightened age, talk in strains far superior to thine in point of mysticism, impenetrable to the eye of common sense.

Again I ask; is this Jesus, the only person in whom the wisdom and power of the One true God the Father were manifested? Probably we shall find as great works performed in the name, and by the power of God, through the instrumentality of others: works even of a more public nature, than any you allow to have been performed by Jesus of Nazareth. Did Jesus heal the lepers that came to him? So did *Elisha*. Did he raise the dead; So did that prophet. Did he shew the glory of God to his disciples on mount Tabor? So did the other to his servant on the hill of Samaria. Did he turn water into wine? *Moses* turned the rock into water. *Moses* and *Aaron* wrought all the wonders of God in Egypt—Divided the Red Sea—Made the serpent that healed the plague in Israel, &c. so that if the wisdom and power of God, manifesting themselves by a man as their instrument, entitle him to be thus represented, with much more propriety may it be said of *Moses* or of *Aaron*, than of *Jesus*, “In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily;” and yet no inspired penman ever ascribed this dignity to those Old Testament prophets.

It is certainly true, Sir, that in all your studies, the doctrine of consequences has had but a very slender share. Permit me a second time, to recommend it to your serious consideration.

Truly rational Christians, I mean those who

worship the ONE GOD in TRINITY, as FATHER, SON AND HOLY GHOST, avoid this difficulty, which absurd enthusiasts plunge themselves into. They clearly see, that how great soever were the works of Old Testament prophets, they were all performed in the name, and by the power of another; but their Christ performed his miracles by his own power, and received the glory of them himself.

Moreover, is it not language dark and unintelligible, becoming none but a frantic enthusiast, to talk of Jesus being but a mere man, and yet the residence of the Godhead or the Divine Essence? To have the whole fulness of the Godhead dwelling bodily in him, and yet have no personal claim to proper Deity, or personal Union with that same Godhead that is to dwell in him? Surely this manner of speaking, is far from that plain and simple style which even the runner may read, and in which the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err?

It is every whit as difficult to conceive, how all the fulness of the Godhead should dwell bodily in a man, and yet that same ineffable Deity, never to have been in any sense incarnated so as to dwell amongst us. Can any man therefore be blamed for giving the preference to *Mohammed's Koran*, a book that is clear from every sentence, that so much as tends to confound either Christ or *Mohammed* with pure and essential Deity? Although in

so doing we are obliged to reject the Bible, as the most unintelligible and ambiguous of all writings whatever; as undoubtedly it is, if your scheme of doctrine be true.

I am,

REVEREND SIR,

Yours, &c.

J. MACGOWAN.

LETTER XIX.

Reverend Sir,

As I could not possibly do myself the honour of sufficiently explaining our subject by the last post, I hope you will have the goodness to bear with me, if by this I send you a few additional remarks upon the absurdity of the penmen of the New Testament, and the visible embarrassment into which they have involved you, and the rest of your reverend brethren; the preachers of a Jesus Christ have in all respects like yourselves, and not yet 1800 years existent.

It might have been expected, that a gentleman of your comprehensive genius, would have a little attended to the paradoxical paraphrase on John 1. which I transmitted to you in my Familiar Epistles, before you had again adduced it in favour of your scheme. The paraphrase was just, upon your application of the text; and your silence has been understood to result from a conscious incapacity to refute. But as that same passage has been pressed into the service of the Socinian enthusiasm, a second time, directly contrary to its genuine intention, I shall take the liberty to animadvert upon it, and on your application of it.

“ In the beginning was the word, and the Word was with God, and the Word *was* God, &c. &c.” These words, you think, interpreted in the most literal manner, only imply, that the Word, or Christ, had a being before the creation of the world, although he had, in reality, no existence prior to his being born of the Virgin: that he had the title of God, but by no means is to be considered as God, &c *.” So then God called him what he really was not; and thus became necessary to our idolatry. Was this acting the part of a wise and faithful Creator; or of a designing adversary? This cannot be the God in whom I trust, and whom I adore.

You have allowed, that the above-mentioned passage, if literally interpreted, does imply, that CHRIST JESUS did exist before the creation of the world, and yet, in other productions of your prolific pen, you boldly assert, that he had no being prior to his birth of the Virgin. Even the subsequent paragraph, gives it as your opinion, that the apostles intention was to overthrow the doctrine of his pre-existence.

I shall, for the present, admit that to be the apostles intention, as it will suit my purpose, as well as if I was to suppose the contrary, and will serve to manifest the grand object I have in view, namely the obscurity of the penmen of holy writ, on supposition, that your doc-

* Fam. Illust. 30.

trine be the Gospel of Jesus. I shall therefore consider it in both views, as applicable either to Christ or to the power and energy of God. “In the beginning was the word; the Word whatever it was, was with God, and the Word was God, and yet was not properly God. The same was in the beginning with God, and yet was not in the beginning, nor for a great while afterwards. All things were made by him, yet he himself was a made Being. Without him was not any thing made that is made; and yet every thing that is, was made, and the whole of creation finished 4000 years before he was born—In him was life, such life as we ourselves possess; and the life was the light of men, by a virtuous conversation; and although he was but a man like ourselves, his light shined in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.—He was in the world, and the world was made by him, though he did not exist for 4000 years after the world *was made*. He was in the world, and the world knew him not, although they believed in him as a man like themselves. This same Word was made flesh, and yet God was in no sense incarnated; he dwelt among us, and yet the man in whom he dwelt was no more *than a man like ourselves*. We beheld his glory, but it was not *his* glory, but that of the Father upon him; as the only begotten of the Father; and yet the Father hath

many sons and daughters, begotten even as he was: full of grace and truth, and yet he is as much dependant on the Father as we are." Such, Sir, is the true sense of the passage, according to your plan of doctrine, if applied to Jesus Christ, and how full of confusion and absurdity it is, the above may serve as a specimen.

I shall now take it expressly in your sense, as by the word, the wisdom, power, and energy of God himself, being intended without any reference whatever had to Jesus Christ, as a divine person existing in Deity, and then we shall have an opportunity of seeing how much more it looks like the ravings of *enthusiasm*, than the cool soberness of infinite wisdom.

“ In the beginning was God, and God was God himself; the same was in the beginning with God—And God was made flesh, and dwelt among us; yet that flesh which God assumed, had no manner of personal Union with God. And we beheld the glory of God, as of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth.”

Or you may take it thus, according to your amended explanation* ; “ In the beginning of creation, were *wisdom and power*; *wisdom and power* were with God; and *wisdom and power* were God. *Wisdom and power* were made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld their glory, the glory as of the only

* Fam. Illust. pag. 31.

begotten of the Father full of grace and truth." So that at all events, we must have *one* that begets *another*, that is *begotten*, even upon your pretendedly rational plan.

But according to either of the above senses, I pray you, how much does the apostles stile rise above the level of nonsense? Whether we understand by the WORD JESUS CHRIST, or the power, wisdom, and energy of God, it is obscure, ambiguous, and equivocal. It has a direct tendency to lead us to believe, that there was a Being called the Word, long enough before the Virgin brought forth her Son; one who was a distinct person from the Father, and who of himself had a proper claim to Deity. Consequently, if Jesus is in reality none other than a mere man like ourselves, and if the worshipping of him as God incarnate be idolatry, as you say it is, we have just cause to wish that John's gospel had never been written; or that it had been burnt, rather than to have fallen into our hands. And you know that this passage, because of its great obscurity, has very much tended to mislead the idolatrous Trinitarians. They think it perfectly consistent with their own views of the Redeemer's person, and find no difficulty of accommodating it to their plan of doctrine; whereas nothing less than all the wisdom of the crooked serpent, will be sufficient to accommodate it to your scheme of rational religion, otherwise irrational enthusiasm.

I assure you, Doctor, that in reading your Familiar Illustration, I very often think of the mountain in the fable, which, after such a noise and outcry in labour, brought forth only a—mouse. I might give you numerous instances of it if I was in the humour; but shall as usual quote just as many as I think necessary. The first of which is that Rom. ix. 5. from pag. 32. of your Illustrations. “Whose are the Father’s, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. This may with equal propriety and truth be rendered, God, who is over all, be blessed for ever. The former sentence ending with the word came.”

It might have been observed, however, that the word *came* is not in the text, but supplied by the translators with great propriety. You seem to confess, that our translation of the passage, is just, supposing, indeed, that your own translation is only equally proper.

It was certainly very inaccurate, however if according to you, the writer has left this passage in such a confused state, as to mislead the church for these seventeen hundred years. There have been men of learning in all the ages of the gospel dispensation, and yet they could never see into this mistaken notion, but have gone on worshipping the Son even as they worshipped the Father. So that, at all events, it serves to shew the obscurity of the

apostolic writings, which is the point I contend for, in favour of *Al Koran* and the *Mohammedan religion*.

To be sure, the Trinitarians believing in CHRIST'S DIVINITY, find no manner of difficulty in this passage. They think that the apostle could not have delivered the mind of the Spirit, if he had written otherwise. They rejoice that they have a friend, who can, without robbery of the Deity, claim an equality with the Father.

They think that no greater happiness could accrue to the human-race, than to have one who is the friend of sinners, and at the same time, is God over all blessed for ever more. But they frankly allow a right to depend upon their own righteousness, and to believe in a Saviour who is but a man like themselves, to gentlemen who are not sinners, but men of virtue? men of clear heads and sound hearts, who are capable of comprehending all that they will believe.

If Jesus Christ be not God over all, we have an undoubted right to censure the apostle for the obscurity of his stile; but if he should prove at last none other than God incarnate, I tremble for the fate of those enthusiasts who deny his proper Deity. For if he that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son

of God, and hath counted the blood of the Covenant by which the Son of God was sanctified, an unholy thing, and done despite to the Spirit of grace? Seeing vengeance belongeth to him, and he will repay it.

Like unto this is that of 1 John v. 20. quoted by you*, and attempted to be explained away. But how ridiculously we shall see by and by. “And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.” The latter clause is undoubtedly explanatory of the title, him that is true, or the true One, as you observe. But I must beg your patience, whilst I remark (1.) That not God, abstractly considered, is represented in Scripture, as the life of his people, but Jesus Christ, as appears from Col. iii. 4. compared with John i. 4. Is it not therefore evident confusion to tell us in one place, “Christ is our life,” and in another, to direct us to a different person, and say, “This is eternal life.”

(2.) Who is said to be the true One, besides him that declares himself to be the true and faithful witness, the truth itself? Is it not very strange to hear John pointing to an absolute God, saying, “This is him that is true,” and at the same time, to hear a man like ourselves

* Fam. Illust 32.

reply, "I am the true and faithful witness: I am the truth itself." What can we think is either Christ's or the apostle's design? Which of them shall we believe, seeing both cannot be right?

(3.) Where are believers ever said to be in God, exclusive of a Mediator? But we are in him that is true, says the apostle. You say, him that is true, intends the One God the Father only. Ought we not to have some scriptural warrant for supposing ourselves to be in God the Father only? Would not this be something like ascribing personal Union with Deity to ourselves, whilst we deny it to his only begotten Son Jesus?

Nothing can, I think, be plainer, than, that the apostle intended us to consider Jesus Christ the Son of the Father, as *him that is true*, the Truth, or the true One; and that of him he says, "This is the true God and eternal life, in the Union of the divine Essence." If he had any other intent, he might surely have hit upon a more happy and intelligible method of expressing himself, especially if inspired by the Holy Ghost, as is generally believed.

That passage, John xx. 28*. "Thomas answered and said unto him, my Lord, and my God," must by no means be omitted, though I troubled you with my thoughts upon it, on a former occasion. Since then I have seen a very ingenious and uncommon

* Fam. Illust. 33.

explanation, written by one of your warm Kentish Votaries, which in substance is as follows, “ Thomas meeting Jesus very unexpectedly, in a surprize, cried, my Lord, I did not expect to have seen you now—My God! is it you?” Thus this fanatical writer, who jumbles both houses of parliament, Doctor Dawson, and the shaver together, in the same incoherent performance, supposes, that Thomas the apostle, in order to testify his joy at seeing his master, took the Almighty’s name in vain: and that Jesus, out of zeal for the Father’s glory, suffers that prophaneness to go unreproved, and even encourages it.

Your explanation is much more genteel, but very little more to the purpose. Seeing, with all your address, you have not exculpated the apostle Thomas from the charge of idolatry, in worshipping Jesus the Son as his Lord and God. If another, essentially distinct from Christ, is intended by Lord and God in the text, why are we not told of it in the context? If we are not told of it, how can we be justly damned for not knowing it? How can we believe without a preacher?

1 John v. 7. *There are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these Three are One.* If you, Sir, or Sir Isaac Newton, really have seen John’s original copy of this epistle, and carefully perused it, I must believe your assertion, “ That this verse was not in it.” But then it only

erves to shew, that our Bible is, by the villainy of Trinitarians, got into such a corrupt state, that it is high time to reject it, and embrace the Koran. I know divers others, have as clearly proved, that it was in the original copies, but what then; still I shall carry my point, seeing that not one sentence of the Koran has been ever questioned in point of originality. Indeed, much is due to the testimony of *Sir Isaac Newton*, provided he could read the book of Scripture with as much propriety as he could the book of Nature, but of this there are some doubters, who intend no disrespect to that astonishing genius. But the more his testimony avails, the sooner we shall get rid of the Bible, and have the Turkish Koran established as the pure word of the living God; reject Jesus, and embrace the prophet Mohammed as by far the most consistent.

That in 1 Tim. iii. 16. *God was manifest in the flesh*, you tell us, is also in a corrupt state*. But why all this labour, in turning over musty manuscripts, enough to give one the pestilence? Seeing you own, that even our translation is literally true? You say, that the Father, who was in him, did the works. This is what perplexes us, that the Father should live and act in the flesh of Jesus, as a

* Illust. 38. Note, referring to the great pains Dr. Priestley tells us he has taken in examining many rare manuscript copies of the New Testament.

soul lives and acts in the human body, and that after all, this flesh in which God was manifested, had no manner of personal Union with the Deity, any more than we ourselves have, according to your assertion.

One quotation more from the apostolic writings, and then I shall conclude, for really I begin to tire of the subject, it is so full of confusion; therefore I beg to be excused from following you any farther upon it, than just to note the impropriety of that, Col. i. 15. on supposition, that Jesus Christ had no existence prior to his being born of the Virgin.

“ Who is the image of the invisible God, the first born of every creature. For by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him and for him, and he is before all things, and by him all things consist.”

What could the apostle mean, by calling him the first-born of every creature when some creatures were actually born more than four thousand years before him, according to your reckoning? To say, that all things in heaven and earth, visible and invisible, were created by him, when the truth is, he created none of them, but was even a created Being himself? That all things subsist by him, seeing he is but a mere man like ourselves? That he is before all things, notwithstanding the heavens

and earth, angels, men, devils, and brutes and vegetables, were before him for many ages? I enter into no dispute with you, except, whether the apostle expresses himself in a manner in which people of common sense are likely to understand him, as intending a mere man, who had no being but a very few months or years before himself?

Yet I have heard this same Paul, by some of your people, highly applauded as a great man, a wonderful man, a prodigy of genius, &c. notwithstanding all his absurdities and clashings with your scheme of doctrine.

I am,

REVEREND SIR,

Yours, &c.

J. MACGOWAN.

LETTER XX.

Reverend Sir,

HAVING in my two last, given a small specimen of the obscurity and ambiguity of the apostolic writings, on supposition, that your doctrine is true; I shall in this venture to enquire, whether the conduct of the Jews, in putting Christ to death, ought to be justified or censured, supposing still that he was but a mere man like ourselves. Awful as it is, it may be inserted, that if he was only such, they had good reason for rejecting him as an impostor, and for treating him as a blasphemer: and this, if true, will make the idolatry of Trinitarians appear more gross and shocking. To ascertain this point, it will be necessary to enquire, whether they had a law against blasphemy, and whether they went according to that law in their proceedings against him.

The Jewish law inflicted death upon every blasphemer, as appears John xix. 7. Lev. xxiv. 16. And he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death, all the congregation shall certainly stone him*; and agreeably to this law, they took

* Exod. xxii. Lev. xix.

up stones to have stoned Jesus, when they apprehended him to be guilty of blasphemy, in making himself equal with God.

Seeing they had a law which doomed blasphemers to death, it cannot be doubted, that the Sanhedrim, with the consent of the Roman governor, had a power of judging and condemning blasphemers, according to that law: seeing the law had been given in vain, if the executive power had not been lodged somewhere; and where so likely as in the great council of the nation, at a time when there was no king in Israel.

The main difficulty is to determine, whether or not Jesus Christ was guilty of blasphemy; and if but a man in all respects like ourselves, there is something so like it in his conduct and doctrine, that it is no wonder they understood him as blaspheming their God. Modern Jews may very well justify the conduct of their fathers, from the writings of his immediate disciples, whom they must necessarily consider as having been trained up in blasphemy, the blame of which they fail not to lay upon the master himself, as their teacher.

One disciple ascribes all the works of creation to him, whether of things visible or invisible, in heaven or on earth, which is downright falsehood and blasphemy; a robbery committed against God the Father, on supposition, that Christ himself is but a mere creature, who had no existence for thousands of years after

creation was finished. Another disciple addressed him thus, "Lord, thou knowest all things." It is in vain to alledge, that *all things* here ought to be understood in a limited sense, and doth not imply an ascription of omniscience. If that is the sense, why are we not told so? Why did not Jesus correct the apostles words, lest they should prove a stumbling to others? Would not any body take Peter to intend nothing less than omniscience in its utmost latitude, seeing the knowledge of the heart is one thing evidently referred to. Thou knowest all things, thou knowest *that I love thee*. Which he could not do without searching the heart. But I have shewn, that he was so far from reproving Peter for this confession, that he even assumes this divine prerogative of searching the heart to himself.

No less than five times does Jesus in the revelation assume the name first and the last, expressive of the eternity of the MOST HIGH, which a mere man could not do without shocking blasphemy, seeing God will not give his glory to another. Office and station will never warrant his assumption of titles peculiar to supremacy, if he himself be in every sense subordinate, as you would have him supposed, and as the Jews considered him. This title, the FIRST and the LAST, being held sacred to the supreme Being, throughout the whole of the Jewish dispensation, and now assumed by

CHRIST, without any reference had to any greater and higher than himself, convinceth me, that if He is but a mere man like ourselves, he must have been the most notorious blasphemer that ever existed, and that the Jews are in the right, to deny him with a scornful rejection.

But although the manner in which the apostles speak of their Master, and what he says of himself in the book of Revelation, may fully justify the moderns in their rejecting of him, it cannot be urged as a plea for the ancient Jews, who crucified Christ before any of those books were written. It may therefore be proper to enquire into the grounds of their judgment, and the propriety of their conduct, from the ministry of Christ himself*.

To enter upon a formal process against JESUS OF NAZARETH, the idol of the Orthodox, to speak in the language of some rational divines; be it observed, that the

1. Charge against him is, "That he being not above thirty-three years of age, made the people believe that he existed before Abraham." The witness against him is, John viii. 56. "Your father, Abraham, rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto him, thou art not

* I beg my reader never to lose sight of our leading supposition, "That Jesus Christ is no more than a man like ourselves; one who had no manner of existence prior to his being born of the Virgin;" for if you lose sight of this, you will take the writer to be either a Jew or a Mohanmedan.

yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, verily, verily, I say unto you, before Abraham was, I AM." Your forced exposition of this passage, avails nothing in his defence. That he insinuated his own existence being prior to that of Abraham, is clear to a demonstration. And the Jews understood him according to the plain and obvious meaning of his words, therefore took up stones to have punished him for his arrogance in making himself older, and consequently greater than their *father Abraham*. If they mistook him, why did he not stay and clear up the mistake, instead of hiding himself, and getting privately away? This would have been charity becoming his pretensions to benevolence. But he never attempted in any future discourse to set them right in this matter, consequently we conclude his intent was, that people should believe in him as older than Abraham; this is the least of what is implied in his declaration, especially if compared with his behaviour immediately upon it.

2. Although he had no existence prior to his being born of the Virgin, he endeavoured to make the people believe, that he had been in heaven, that he came down from heaven, and was made flesh; all of which tended to make him be thought somewhat, at least, more than a man like ourselves. For proof of this charge, see John iii. 13. "No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came

down from heaven, even the Son of Man who is in heaven." That nothing short of a descending from heaven was intended, appears from v. 31. "He that cometh from above, is above all: he that cometh from heaven, is above all." Especially when compared with chap. xvi. 28. "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again I leave the world, and go unto the Father." If words have any meaning at all, Jesus could design no less than to persuade the people, that heaven was his residence prior to his incarnation; and in this light the apostles understood him, for they said, "now speakest thou plainly, and not in parables." And Christ himself suffers them to continue in that same belief, without attempting to convince them that they had mistaken his meaning. And such has been the effect of these and such like expressions of his, relative to his anti-incarnate state, that all who believe the New Testament to be the word of God, a few Arians and Socinians excepted, have uniformly believed in him as having existed from everlasting. But,

3: He gave his disciples room to consider him as omnipresent, and what is this but robbing the Deity of one of his essential perfections. Mat. xviii. 20. For where two or three are met together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. It will require great address

to twist this passage into any other form, than that of a declaration of personal omnipresence.

Believers may be met in his name, at one and the same time, in every parish church and dissenting meeting-house, in Britain and Ireland, or even in Europe, &c. and what less than a presence universally diffusive, can be adequate to this engagement. Did it not therefore tend to mislead his followers into a notion, that he could be present in many places at one and the same time. Or in other words, that he was possess'd of a nature infinitely superior to mere humanity? Were we to hear the head of any party, encouraging his disciples to hope for his presence wherever they should assemble, would we not instantly conclude, either that he is a madman, or a designing villain? By parity of reason, the Jews had equal ground to be offended with Jesus Christ for such a manner of speaking, on supposition, that he hath no personal title to divine prerogatives.

Yet he is so far from relinquishing his pretensions, that even after they had punished his blasphemy with death, and he was risen from the dead, he repeats the promise with very considerable addition. "Lo I am with you always, even to the end of the world." So that there was promised not only the universal extent, but the perpetuity of his presence. It is not my province to enquire, what possible sense may be imposed upon the words; the business of the law, in cases of high treason, being only

with the obvious meaning of what is spoken, and with the intent of the speaker. And surely it will require great art, to exculpate Jesus from the charge of making his disciples believe him to be every where present. Therefore, though shocking to speak it, the Jews did well in putting him to death for robbing the Deity. Yet the

4. Charge is still more gross, more highly aggravated than the former, for not content with distant allusions, he openly avows an equality with the Father, "I and the Father are One." This I noted before, as an instance of the ambiguity of his stile in preaching; now I considered it as a charge of blasphemy which the Jews had against him, and which undoubtedly was such in the highest degree. My Father is greater than all, he says, and then adds, "I and the Father are One. *"
 If he meant no more than, that he and the Father were One in will and design, might not the expletive easily have been added? How can he be justified in provoking the Jews, by using terms capable of being received in the most absolute sense, without attempting to explain his meaning? He even urges the propriety of his assertion, and for proof, adduces his unparalleled works. So that, consistently with sound reasoning, they could not have understood him otherwise than as making himself God. If it is replied in a way of excuse for him, "that

* The word my is a supplement.

in other places he expressly says, my Father is greater than I." The Jew may very justly retort upon us, "A sorry confession, indeed! for a man who is but of yesterday, to confess barely, than God is greater than him." Might you or I use even this expression, think you, consistently with a sense of the distance between the creature and the infinite Creator.

But Jesus seems even to have persuaded his disciples to believe in him, as identically the same with the Father, in respect to Essence. What less can be understood by what he says to Philip? John xiv. 8, 9, 10. Lord shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us? Jesus saith unto him, have I been so long with you, *and yet hast thou not known me Philip.* He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father: and how sayest thou, shew us the Father? Surely no man could understand him as designing otherwise, than to represent himself as essentially One with the Father; which, for a mere man to do, is the most shocking of all blasphemy; and he that would do so, was undoubtedly worthy of death, the law of the Lord having denounced the sentence.

But that is not all, for he even suffered himself to be worshipped, and never reproved any worshipper, for shewing him too much respect, which may serve as a

5. Charge against him in the eye of a Jew. You, indeed, have laboured to exculpate him from this charge; and have reduced this wor-

ship to such a state, as to mean no more than a fine bow or a curtsie means with us.

But, Sir, it is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Is worship here the same with what was paid to Jesus? If different, from whence do you gather your evidence? From the difference of expression, or otherwise? Not from the difference of expression. Therefore produce your warrant? Otherwise we shall still think, that suffering himself to be worshipped, was a crime worthy of death. Surely no man can easily misunderstand Thomas the apostle in his address to Jesus, "My Lord, and My God;" which address was no way offensive, consequently Christ never reproves him, much less attempts to rectify his mistake.

How different was Mohammed's behaviour on a similar occasion, according to the testimony of *Al Beidowi*. Two Jewish Christians, named *Abu Rafe al Koradhi*, and *Al Seyid al Najrani*, came to Mohammed, and offered to worship him, and acknowledge him for their Lord: to which that zealous prophet answered, "God forbid, that we should worship any besides God." So far, indeed, was he from receiving worship, that he is said to have confessed himself a sinner, and to have asked pardon an hundred times a day, if his commentators deserve any credit.

These charges being summoned up in one, after the manner of British judges in their

charge to the jury, would not any twelve men have brought him in guilty; consequently the Jews and Pontius Pilate, did nothing but an act of justice in putting him to death, in that open ignominious manner recorded in the sacred Scriptures.

From all that has been said, it is clear, that the advantage is greatly on the side of the Mohammedan religion, and that its abettors have fewer difficulties to surmount, than those who glory in the name of rational Christians. But who may, at the same time, be treated as the most absurd of all enthusiasts: whilst the Trinitarians have the felicity of acting in a consistency with themselves as men of faith and religion, as well as with the dictates of revelation.

As it is a matter of no moment at all, whether Socinianism, or the religion of Mohammed prevail, neither of them having the least connection with real Christianity, which is the only religion taught in the word of God; I shall sum up, in one point of view, the reasoning of this and the former letters.

I have shewn, and perhaps with as much force of argument, as you may heartily approve, that there is the most perfect agreement between the prophet Mohammed and yourself, respecting the doctrine of the One God, and that of the Trinity, and it will be very difficult to determine, whether you, or that Arabian, expresses most abhorrence of the

Trinity. So that whether there be Three that bear record in heaven or not, it is certain there are Two Men who bear the same testimony against that record.

Further, that there is the most perfect harmony between Mohammed and you, respecting the person of Jesus, as but a man like yourselves—also in regard to his mission, as a prophet or a teacher sent from God. So that how irrational soever you may deem the orthodox, that prophet was at least as intelligent as yourself.

I have shewn, that if your doctrine be true, Mohammed was a more consistent prophet than David, Isaiah, and the rest of the Old Testament prophets—That he was even a better preacher than Christ and all his apostles—That he was more tender of the Divine character, and more zealous for the glory of God, than all the prophets; than Christ and all his apostles, consequently, that he gave better proof of the divinity of his mission, than Jesus gave of his. I have even shewn, that were your doctrine that of the Gospel, the world has received more extensive and more lasting advantages from Mohammed, than from all that Jesus Christ hath done and suffered. And to close the whole, I have demonstrated, that if the Lord Jesus be but a mere man like ourselves, he was an arrant impostor, a notorious blasphemer, and as such, most justly con-

demned by the Jewish Sanhedrim, and still rejected by their offspring.

These conclusions, Sir, dreadful as they are, naturally result from your scheme of doctrine, And is this what is obtruded upon us, under the character of rational religion? Boast no more, Sir, of your superior reason, till you have rejected a scheme laden with such absurdity. To become Mohammedans at once, would be acting with propriety, for then you would have a consistent system, as to the point before us; but your present motley, heterogeneous, perplexed system, has, it is to be hoped a natural, a necessary tendency to dissolution. Remember, however, that these things are not to be trifled with. And permit me to subscribe myself,

REVEREND SIR,

Your humble Servant,

J. MACGOWAN.

P. S. I am not at all solicitous about the time or manner of your answer, but shall consider myself at liberty to resume my pen, when any fresh attack is made on the doctrine of Christ's proper Divinity, because if that falls, my hope must perish for ever.

N. B. Those who have time and inclination to consider the other articles treated of in your appeal, will find every one of them equally big with absurdity.

Note, All the quotations from the KORAN, are from the octavo edit. printed in 1764.

The quotations from the APPEAL, from edit. 2, with improvements, 1771, without a bookseller's name.

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